

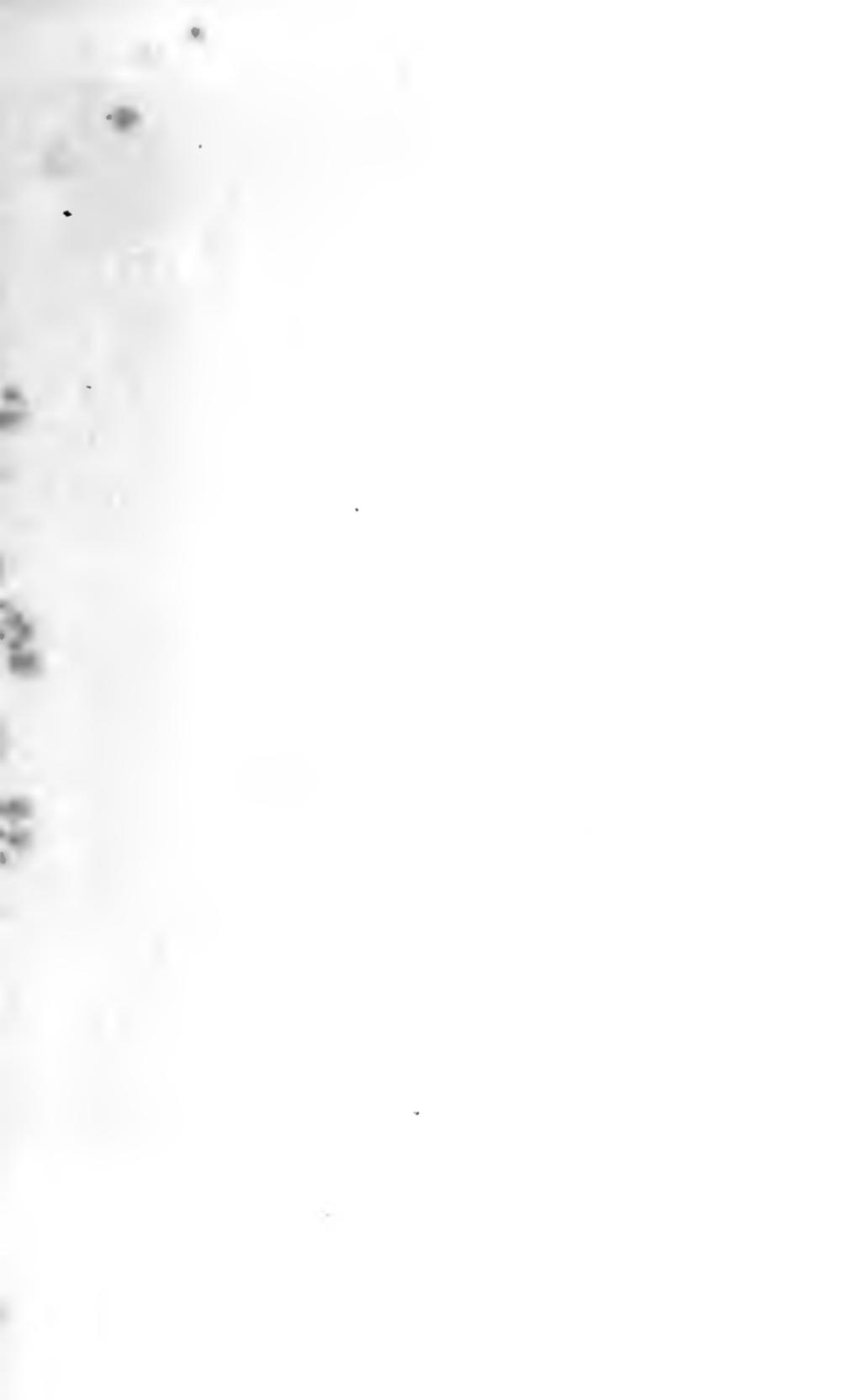
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THE DIVINE GIFT

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Henry Arthur Jones

THE DIVINE GIFT
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

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DEDICATION

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DEDICATION

To PROFESSOR GILBERT MURRAY, LL.D.,
Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford.

DEAR PROFESSOR MURRAY, — In your interesting summary of the modern English drama, as reported in an American paper last spring, you incidentally buried me. I had not the faintest idea that I was dead, and am still under the impression that I am alive. But this may be merely a wilful, selfish prejudice of mine.

Vast numbers of our population, wearing a human shape, move about amongst us, eating, chattering, marketing, dressing and undressing themselves, crowding our streets and churches and trains, in the fixed idea that they are alive; whereas they are virtually as defunct as if their bones were in the earth and their souls with the saints. You will have noticed that these colloidal bodies form a large proportion of our voters at elections, and of our audiences at the theatres; while many of our newspapers and

popular magazines are written almost exclusively for them.

And for all I know I may be one of them. In that case it was a kindly and thoughtful action on your part to bury me. For this persistent mass of obstructive matter, walking about in the guise of living men and women, is a sad and main hindrance to the real business of the world. And as our drama is already clogged and choked with it, you were moved by a wise impulse in trying to get some of it out of the way.

Being thus mercifully disposed of, I fear it shows a great want of consideration on my part to revisit you, and ask you to accept the dedication of the following play, written, I grieve to tell you, after my compulsory interment. You cannot but think it a monstrous impertinence for me to pretend to be still alive. It may be necessary for you, or for some stern guardian of the very latest school of modern drama, to treat me as *Punch* treats the obtuse policeman who also shows symptoms of recalcitrant vitality — to chastise my obstinacy with redoubled thwacks, and to shout over me more exultant paeans. At least I here offer you a chance to give me a deeper and more determined and, more forcible burial — after you have carefully ascertained this time that I am really dead.

However, this preference or whim of mine for keeping alive is, after all, a mere personal concern. If I can be persuaded that the interests of the drama are thereby to be served I am ready to yield

the point, and will uncomplainingly attend my own funeral in the usual quiescent horizontal manner. In any case it is not a matter of great importance.

What, however, is of great importance is the fact that an English scholar and man of letters of your standing is to be found taking a keen interest in the modern acted drama ; that you are alive to its vast influence for good or evil in our national life ; that you are searching out its laws ; that you are actively engaged in advancing its welfare, and bringing it again into communion with English literature ; that being a man of letters you are also a man of the theatre. That is a fact upon which the English modern drama is to be congratulated. And if I have timidly hinted a doubt as to the soundness of your judgment in one individual case, this need scarcely detract from the value of your advocacy as a whole.

For English men of letters do as a rule make a woeful mess of it when they turn their attention to the modern drama. There was Mr. Birrell, for instance, who set out to prove that Browning was essentially a popular playwright who only just missed being popular, because the dense stupidity of the public would not allow him to be popular in his own remote unpopular way.

However, Mr. Birrell has ceased to confuse the public mind upon the subject of dramatic literature, and has since been elegantly toying with National Education and Home Rule.

Now our so-called modern literary plays may for the most part be divided into three classes—those that are

not plays; those that are not literature; and those that are neither plays nor literature.

Clearly, a literary play should first of all be a play. Its story, motives, and characters should be so plain and direct as to hold the interest of an average audience from beginning to end. It should stand the noisy test of representation on the boards.

Clearly, a literary play should also be literature. If it is a play of modern life its dialogue should be easy, natural, colloquial, unstilted, unaffected, characteristic of each person speaking in each situation. It should carefully avoid being banal, commonplace, slangy, or smart and epigrammatic on the level of a cheap comic illustrated paper. It should stand the quiet test of reading in the study.

This does not imply that the literary dramatist is limited in his choice of characters to those persons who talk like a book. It does imply that he should choose only those persons who occasionally do and say things that are worthy of remembrance, and that he should choose them in those few moments and situations when they are saying and doing such things. And to the extent that he does this, will his play become more and more unlike a picture of ordinary average actualities, more unlike what is called "a slice of life." It will become more artificial in that sense in which all works of art are artificial. The higher the art and the higher the subject, the more surely the artist is forced to employ transparent artifice. Art is art because it is not nature.

I notice you are growing impatient. You will

surely rebuke me for daring to offer such a platitude to the translator of Euripides and Aristophanes. But I am not now addressing you as the delightful and scholarly translator, who commands my unquestioning admiration. I am addressing you as the critic of modern English drama. And may I be pardoned for saying that, in your reported American utterances, I thought I detected some divergency of general outlook between your two characters? I thought I perceived what Urquhart, equal in renown with yourself as a translator of classics, would have called "an enormous dissolution of continuity."

But this failure of mine to reconcile your points of view may be due to that perversity and confusion which cloud the mind and vision of moribund persons, and which probably deepen and intensify when once they are safely and determinately dead. And perhaps it is this perversity and confusion of mind which, clinging to me even in the shades, lead me to ask a few querulous inopportune questions.

Has not our modern drama been getting away from the centre of late? Is it not showing a tendency to leave the main road and run up little by-lanes? When it is not freakish, argumentative, paradoxical, does it not become merely photographic and phonographic? In its ambition to be a faithful reporter of life, a diligent student of commonplace persons in commonplace moods and situations, a cataloguer of small actualities, has it not largely declined to be the haunting imaginative interpreter of life? And in its desire to transcribe in an honest businesslike way

the actual talk of actual everyday persons, has it not largely denied itself the chance of saying anything that is worth listening to and worth recording? How will these plays look in a dozen years' time? Will their raw modernity mellow with time, and blend with the permanent hues and tones of humanity? How do they read now?

Many plays of the last generation, which you were reported to call old-fashioned, are in print, and their sale, if not large, is steady and regular. Some of them, dating almost twenty years, have been revived at West End theatres within the last year or two, have met with great success, and, strangely enough, have been caressed by the journals as not showing any essential signs of age.

It is true that they do not set out to tackle the latest newspaper and political problems in the spirit and by the methods of the social reformer. Neither does any play that has lived. If I may whisper a caution to young and aspiring playwrights, I would say, "Never choose for your theme a burning question of the hour, unless you wish merely for a success that will burn out in an hour. If you wish your plays to live, choose permanent themes and universal types of character."

A warm admirer and encourager of the youthful Shakespeare once said to him, "Lucky Dramatist, to live in these stirring times, when religious England has just been shaken to her depths, and when all this ferment of Puritanism is rising in her veins! Up, man! Give us a great religious play dealing with

these burning actualities." Shakespeare was deaf that morning.

How stale is the whiff of past controversies and burning problems! How already past and forgotten by the artist are the storms and fevers of his own time! How sure is his path to oblivion who treats some question of the passing hour in some mode of the passing hour!

We have lately been reading *Les Dieux ont soif*. Evariste Gamelin, the young revolutionary painter, was, like yourself, in the heat of a classic Renascence, and will therefore engage your sympathy. Gamelin was in the movement. He proposed to make it hum by means of a pack of revolutionary cards whereon symbolic figures of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity should replace the outworn figments of Kings, Queens, and Knaves. The citizen Blaise with a shrewder knowledge of what is perennially attractive in art advised Gamelin to paint pretty pink ladies with dainty hands and feet. "L'ardeur des citoyens à se régénérer tiédit avec le temps, et les hommes aimeront toujours les femmes."

Gamelin had a furious hatred for Fragonard. Fragonard was not in the movement. Fragonard was not vexing himself and the world about Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Fragonard had committed the mortal sin of being old-fashioned. Gamelin could find in his work neither nature nor truth. In a hundred years it would have rotted miserably in garrets. Meanwhile Gamelin wished that some lover of art would hang and flay Fragonard as a warning

to bad painters. So said Gamelin, who had not your kind gentle way of casually burying defunct artists. And lucky it is for me that I have come under so mild and pleasant a jurisdiction as yours.

But Fragonard, who had never been stridently alive, was on that account all the less inclined to go to an early grave.

A hundred years after Gamelin's prophecy, Fragonard's paintings, instead of having rotted in garrets, were drawing us all to Agnew's. Agnew's had paid eighty thousand pounds for three of them; certainly not because they had much nature or truth, but because they possessed the more enticing qualities of beauty, charm, and exquisite workmanship. And Fragonard remains, though his pictures give sadly little evidence of any burning zeal for social reform. He remains as a guide to artists in times of social ferment and revolution.

Gamelin, too, remains; but not even as a warning to bad painters. He remains only as a warning to promoters of a Renascence in art.

Now I have an intense sympathy with Renascence promoters, because I am one myself. You may remember that I had a dramatic Renascence of my own some twenty years ago. And now it seems there has been another dramatic Renascence—this time a veritable, authentic, unmistakable Renascence of the English drama. As you are intimately associated with this later Renascence, and as you are vouching for its leading spirits, I may perhaps be allowed for the purpose of this paper to call it your Renascence.

I think I may put in some claim to be the original promoter of a dramatic Renascence in this country. Indeed, I might furnish some plausible, if not quite convincing, evidence to show that I am the real, if not the putative, father of your Renascence. But I forbear. For it would ill become Renascence promoters of our standing to dispute over trifles, as did the Dean and Chapter of Hereford over the Athanasian Creed, and Michael and Satan over the soul of George the Third.

There is no vested interest in Renascences. Anybody can start one at any time, and sing *Ca ira*. Therefore I do not propose to hang out a sign, "Original promoter of the English Dramatic Renascence; no connection with any other firm." My object in offering to share the paternity of your Renascence, is to show you that I take a friendly benevolent interest in it. In any case, another dramatic Renascence was to be expected; judging from the fact that, alike in art and medicine and philosophy, whatever is claimed to be eternally right and true in one generation, is proved in the next to be perniciously wrong and fallacious. Thus in 1896 I wrote: "Dramatic reformers always pretend to return to nature and truth, and are generally found out in the next generation to be stale theatrical impostors."

To this complexion must we all come—in the next generation—by the inevitable operation of the law of change. Golden lads and girls all must, like chimney-sweepers, submit to a provisional interment. But a time comes when friendly hands exhume the remains,

and hold an inquest on such of them as still show symptoms of recalcitrant vitality. And then it is discovered that while the chimney-sweepers have come to dust and putrefaction, the golden lads and girls have only put on a borrowed likeness of shrunk death, and they awake as from a pleasant sleep, and come trippingly forth, never again to be hurt by the heat of the sun, or to fear slander and rash censure. The lion Time, as in Victor Hugo's exquisite poem, has only pretended to devour them, and has all the while been lovingly keeping them in his cave, waiting a signal to lead them forth, flushed with resurgent vigour and youth.

If I may jot down a rough rule or two whereby we may estimate the permanent value of a piece of art or literature, I would state them thus : "The form need not be perfect, if the substance is eternal. The substance need not be eternal, if the form is perfect. But form or substance, or both, must be prepared to stand very hard wear. Originality, either of form or substance, is to be shrewdly suspected and questioned. Some element of beauty must enter into the composition."

I hope, for the sake of your reputation as sponsor, and for the sake of my reputation as provisional backer of your Renascence, that you have carefully assured yourself that some such tests as these may be safely applied to the work of our protégés. Otherwise we shall be left in the lurch, and I shall be inclined to hedge, and cry off my share in the paternity.

I have lately heard a former admirer and defender

of Ibsen declare that he had just re-read thirteen of his plays, and found them faded and old-fashioned. So, as Pliable said when he found that a determination to reach the Celestial City merely landed him in a sticky bog, "Where are we now?" If Ibsen is already to be classed with the Bible and myself as "old-fashioned," whose turn is to come next?

Zola, too, was another man who had a Renascence of his own. Zola, too, groped for nature and truth; sometimes, indeed, at the bottom of a cesspool. And now it seems likely that Zola will be far more honoured as the defender of Dreyfus, than as the leader of a movement which has landed his followers and imitators in a very sticky bog.

And so the Renascences come and go. For when once we start having Renascences there's no stopping them. Therefore, I take it, the chief thing for us Renascence promoters to do, is to find out when somebody is coming along with the next one.

If I have not already been too impertinent, would you kindly tell me how long you expect your Renascence to last? Are you quite sure of your men? What about their staying 'power'? Will they hold out for twenty years? Are they golden lads, or mere useful chimney-sweepers? I have a lively reason for pressing these questions upon you. The fact is I'm not quite sure whether I won't have another dramatic Renascence of my own. I am seriously thinking about it.

Now as a friendly Renascence promoter, I am anxious not to encroach on your Renascence—while

it has the vogue. Indeed, while it has the vogue, I shall be one of its warmest and blindest supporters. Nobody will be more ready than myself to discover a profound philosophy of life in what appears to be superficial paradox; or to acclaim as daring genius what has an aspect of mere perversity. If any character is especially tiresome or disagreeable or commonplace, I shall exclaim, "How true to life!—What an insight into human nature!" For who can deny that average human nature is at times very tiresome and disagreeable and commonplace? And how tenaciously these eternal attributes of our common humanity have been seized, how vividly they have been rendered in some of our recent plays! One of the leading aims of your Renascence, so far as I have been able to understand it, is to avoid any action and story that might arouse emotion; and for such action and emotion to substitute any ideas that are likely to promote discussion. And I take it the more ideas that are "presented," and the more perplexing their mode of presentation, the more discussion is likely to be provoked. Here, again, while ideas and discussion are the vogue in the theatre, your Renascence shall have my loudest approval. Later in this volume I have shown my passion for ideas. Meantime, between ourselves, I have an uneasy feeling that ideas in the theatre are driving the great crowd of playgoers to musical comedy, and romping farce, and spectacle. I think, however, that at present we have a goodly number of adherents amongst the omniscient half-educated classes. Our difficulty will

be to prevent these good people from examining our ideas. This, I think, may be overcome by continuing to shower ideas upon them in such profusion and confusion as to keep them in their present attitude of bewildered admiration.

Another difficulty will be to prevent them from finding out that ideas are ceasing to amuse them. On leaving the theatre after reverently witnessing a piece that had been commended to me for its masterly avoidance of action, and its masterly exposition of ideas, I was somewhat shocked to hear the following conversation between two enthusiasts.

“Wasn’t it splendid? Didn’t you enjoy it?”

“Oh yes, I enjoyed it immensely; but don’t you think it was rather dull?”

This sounded to me rather ominous. The play was a masterpiece. I knew that. It had ideas—bushels of them. And in order to appreciate it, as it deserved, I had carefully forgotten all laws of dramatic construction, and had carefully refrained from applying any workable standards of morality. I mention this to show you to what lengths I am willing to go in support of your Renascence—while it has the vogue. But cheerfully as I am prepared to throw overboard all the standards of morality and all the laws of dramatic technique—while it is the vogue to do so—I cannot quite so readily accept the prospect of being bored. I know that this is the final and decisive test of genuine admiration of any work of art—how much unmistakable boredom are we prepared to endure in order to be able to say that we enjoy it?

Rather than you should think me half-hearted, I will not shrink even from this severe test. If I find dullness creeping over me I will try to argue myself out of it. At any rate, I will pretend not to yawn.

All these services I am ready to render to your Renascence—while it has the vogue. More than these amiable pretences I do not think any of us Renascence promoters are entitled to ask from our supporters.

Meantime, I am wondering whether another dramatic Renascence isn't due. And as I am handsomely and unselfishly supporting your Renascence while it has the vogue, I hope I may rely upon you to lend me a hand, if circumstances oblige me to float another Renascence on my own account. It is plain that we cannot have two Renascences at the same time. The public wouldn't stand it. There isn't vogue enough to go round.

Vogue is a most useful and necessary counterpane to cover the defects and eccentricities of a Renascence. It is the size and quantity of the vogue, rather than the quality of the plays, that make for a dramatic Renascence.

And while you have all the counterpane, what is there to cover my imperfections? Excuse my getting a little impatient—there's a keenish wind—I feel a little chilly out here in the cold. Shall you be very long with that counterpane?

I see that you have lost all patience with me. You are saying, "These are mere post-mortem dallyings

and pretexts to loiter in the sunshine and upper air. Be off back!"

And no wonder after seeing me quietly inhumed, you feel some irritation to find that I have burst my cere-ments, and am standing at your door asking you to accept the dedication of the following play.

I do this in the sincerest good faith, knowing how great a gain it is for the modern English drama to have the countenance and sympathy of English men of letters, how impossible it is there should be any worthy or enduring English drama without the pass-port of their authority and judgment.

It is true that their judgment will be liable to error, until they have taken more pains to study and understand the modern stage.

I have already mentioned the sad case of Mr. Birrell.

Then there was the case of Matthew Arnold. Thirty years ago, in pursuit of my ceaseless aim to get English men of letters to understand the English theatre, I drew him to take an interest in the modern acted drama. He came amongst us with a grace and amiability equal to your own. But he had not seen a modern play for a quarter of a century. What was the result?

It goes very much against my grain to deprecate the judgment of any critic who, on any ground what-ever, praises any play of mine. Believe me, I would far rather own myself mistaken. But I am obliged to confess that Matthew Arnold, while perhaps he was right in recognising that a new movement had started

in the drama, did very much overpraise some of my crude early work. His advent, however, in the theatre, like your own advent, was of signal benefit to the struggling English drama; inasmuch as it called attention to the fact that work was being done on the modern stage which was worth the attention and examination of a scholar and man of letters. And this told with the general public. I think I may claim that under shelter of the counterpane Matthew Arnold lent me, I did some useful work for the modern drama. Let us therefore forgive any kindly mistake he may have made in forming too favourable an estimate of my early plays, and pass on to your own case.

Now however readily and generously I may condone the error of a man who has overpraised me, I can scarcely be expected to show quite the same easy magnanimity to a man whom I suspect of having committed the opposite error. But here again I have no wish to be dogmatic.

If I may carry you with me for a moment, let us provisionally assume that there is a sporting chance you may have been mistaken. At least let us venture upon the very general statement that there is some ground for thinking that hitherto English scholars and men of letters have approached and examined the modern English drama only to pronounce wrong judgments upon it. What does that matter?

Consider the enormous mutability and worthlessness of human opinion. Upon any imaginable hypothesis, the vast majority of the countless billions of

men that have peopled this earth, must have spent their leisure in forming entirely wrong opinions about their temporary and eternal welfare. Yet this appalling certainty has never deterred one of them from voting, or from burning his neighbour, or from smashing windows, or from hissing a play. It is difficult to see how mankind are to be restrained from this mischievous habit of forming wrong opinions. Nor perhaps would a world, in which everybody's brain was an automatic register of correct thought, be a pleasant world to live in. It would certainly offer very scanty material to the dramatist. On this score let us be well content that a pervasive muddleheadedness is the permanent and distinguishing trait of humanity. Let us sometimes indulge ourselves in the freedom of being comfortably and carelessly wrong, and let us allow this same freedom to English men of letters in their judgments of the English drama.

For the moment it is of far greater importance that English men of letters should interest themselves in our modern drama than that they should form right opinions about it. Therefore I hope the possibility that you have been mistaken in one of your estimates will not discourage you from making another assay.

But you will say, What is the use of English men of letters coming to criticise the modern drama when it appears they always form wrong judgments about it? Why not leave the verdict to the public? Ultimately the verdict must be left to the public. There can be no question about that.

Now so far as a play is a bit of stagecraft, a theatri-

cal entertainment devised to amuse the public, the public is a righteous and summary judge. The public themselves will always take care of that side of it.

But you will agree with me that a play to be worth consideration should have other and higher qualities than that of instantly catching and amusing the public for an hour.

Modern English plays are scarcely ever judged by playgoers except on the count of their instant appeal to the mere amusement instinct. That is one reason we have no national drama. The literary quality of a play is barely in evidence amongst us and scarcely counts. Our audiences are rarely guided to take note of dignified and appropriate diction. Therefore they hold it of no value, and are satisfied with the careless slang of the drawing-room and the street.

That is where men of letters come in. For I suppose I shall not be told that the drama of a nation has no concern to preserve the purity and vigour of the language.

Now the errors of English men of letters in the theatre are chiefly in matters merely theatrical, where they are unversed; and where as we have already seen the public themselves are already qualified judges. In matters of literature, English men of letters are likely to be right, and their influence and authority are most valuable; because their verdicts filter through to the average careless playgoer, gradually raising his standard of appreciation, and gradually persuading him to recognise what is of enduring excellence.

I submit this play to you, then, as a man of letters.

In thus handing the play over to you, I am unluckily compelled to leave you the dangerous latitude of an entire freedom of judgment upon it. And I fear this may not be wholly favourable to the play.

I cannot hope that it will engage your sympathies so far as it touches upon present social questions and tendencies. In my capacity as private citizen I have an innate radicalism which burns to reform our social system, and instantly to remodel the world after my own notions. I hope I have not allowed this private radicalism to become too obtrusive in the play. If I may give expression to my fatherly interest in your Renascence, I fancy I have discovered in some of its leaders a slight tendency to make the drama a kind of maid-of-all-work to political and social movements, and do all sorts of useful odd jobs to tidy up the world. This is well. The world needs to be tidied up. Things are not as they should be—far from it. Even when we have reformed the British drama, and given women a vote, some abuses will remain.

Now as a private citizen nobody could be more anxious than I am to sweep away all social abuses and everybody's wrongs. But as dramatists we must distinguish. We must sternly repress our noble rage to administer the universe.

The Governor of Tilbury Fort in the "Critic" could not in his public duty yield to the promptings of his father's heart.

*The father softens—but the Governor
Is fixed.*

If, therefore, you find that in the following pages social questions are shirked in an attempt to sustain the interest of the play, you will understand that although I am a relentless social reformer, and have a grandfatherly fondness for my own fads, yet as Governor of Tilbury Fort I must preserve a severe anti-thesis between my private feelings and my public duty.

My innate radicalism has, I daresay, peeped out. But in the present instance, if I may use Parson Lingen's metaphor, this good nourishing milk of radicalism has thrown up a rich Tory cream. You will have noticed that the good milk of radicalism which flows from the bosoms of many of our compatriots, is also at the present moment, under stress of being whipped, throwing up a rich Tory cream. They have their Renascences in politics too, which come and go.

If, therefore, I have allowed an intrusion of present-day questions into the following play, it is rather to cement the character of the speaker than to gain the renown of a successful pamphleteer. These questions happened to stray naturally into the scheme of the play, and I did not turn them out.

Why should I? We have a large and increasing number of painfully earnest playgoers who hunger and thirst for social and political discussion and enlightenment in the theatre. And so far as my sense of public duty as Governor of Tilbury Fort will allow me, I desire to humour them. On second thoughts, I will stretch a point to please them.

*The father softens—and the Governor
Will think it over.*

The great anti-burgling play, which Mr. Puff designed with the idea of showing housebreaking in a ridiculous light, still remains unwritten. But perhaps the theme is scarcely austere enough for our pioneer playgoers. If they will only wait till I have splashed awhile amongst human passions and follies, I promise to set to work in a spirit as painfully earnest as their own, on a most tempting treatise in dialogue which I shall entitle "Dumping Analysed." I shan't call it a play. I shall call it a disposium.

It will contain a fat body of contradictory political and economical doctrine, my object being to prove that all the current opinions on the subject are manifestly idiotic. I am convinced that, long before the fall of the curtain, playgoers of all opinions will own that I have given them a great deal more than they can swallow.

Meantime, perhaps, our more advanced playgoers will be satisfied with the meagre and tentative instalment of sociology which is offered them in the present play; and which, I am careful to explain, is meant to be accepted only by those who happen to agree with it.

But the truth is, I care as little for doctrinal disputes as Gallio or Fragonard. And I feel that if I am to coax you to adopt this play, I must try another tack.

The construction of a play is the last virtue that should be apparent to the public, and the last virtue for which the author should claim recognition. It is, however, the first virtue which the author should set himself to acquire. Until the carpenter has learned

the use of his tools he cannot make a cabinet. The better and more seasoned the wood he has to work upon, the more is the pity he should spoil good material. And if he has only common or faulty material to work upon, fine workmanship is all the more needful to cover its defects. Let him therefore busy himself in his workshop for seven years, and for yet twice seven years.

The main design of the present play gave me scarcely an hour's labour. The scenes fell easily into the simplest arrangement. But the construction within each individual scene gave me infinite trouble and perplexity—more, indeed, than any play I have written. I hope this will not be obvious, and that it will escape the notice of any one who does not happen to read this preface.

It is of no interest except to those who are concerned with the intricacies and devices of dramatic construction, and I merely mention it as a memorandum for their curiosity to note.

The highest aim of dramatic construction is to unify a story so as to present the greatest quantity and variety of action and character in the allotted time. The Shakespearean convention is the only one that by its wide and rapid changes of scene, its easy leaps across continents and years, marshals an enormous pageantry of action and character so that it can pass the spectator in an easy natural way.

Compare the depopulated stage, the attenuated action of Sophocles, Molière, and Racine with the crowded and varied bustle of Shakespeare; the busy

hum that comes from his universal workshop; the drums and tramplings of his hundred legions; the long resounding march of assembled humanity as it troops across his boards.

Even the modern arrangers and adaptors of Shakespeare do not wholly rob him of this richness and fullness. They never quite succeed in pinning him down within our narrower and wholly different convention, though they sometimes prove him to be a tiresome, inconsequent playwright.

For a long generation our realistic drama of modern life has practised an ever-increasing and more severe economy of scene, and action, and dialogue. It tends to deny itself all trappings and effects but those of ordinary everyday life.

It has become an eavesdropping photographic reporter, taking snapshots and shorthand notes. We may, without intending to depreciate it, call our present convention the eavesdropping convention—the convention which charges playgoers half-a-crown or half-a-guinea for pretending to remove the fourth wall, and pretending to give them an opportunity of spying upon actual life, and seeing everything just as it happens.

Under the eavesdropping convention we have greatly gained in naturalness and sincerity of dialogue. Our light comedy still retains a good deal of vicious smartness, empty epigram, and funny triviality. But much of our modern serious drama is remarkable for honesty, directness, and simplicity of expression.

The eavesdropping convention offers the dramatist

fine opportunities for painting realistic character in terse, modern, shorthand dialogue ; it gives him fine opportunities for irony, suggestion, and interrogation. It tends to exclude great passion and great emotion ; it tends to exclude imagination ; in its present development it is a foe to literature. It concerns itself to represent life ; it has almost forgotten to interpret life. It badly needs a chorus, for while it is generally clear in its presentation of facts, it is apt to be as obscure as Providence itself in its final design and intention. Obscurity of intention is permissible and even commendable in Providence, because it generates unquestioning faith in believers. They enjoy it, and are confirmed by it. But playgoers are baffled by obscurity of intention ; therefore the liberty of mystification which may be freely accorded to Providence cannot be extended to the dramatist. Besides, when it comes to setting problems, the dramatist cannot hope to compete with Providence.

The eavesdropping convention is developing a school of admirable realistic actors. We can scarcely go to an English play without seeing one or two little miniature gems of character. It has given us a body of actors and actresses who can render with extreme nicety all those actualities of the drawing-room and the street which are scarcely worth rendering.

But as the eavesdropping convention tends to exclude emotion and imagination from our drama, so it tends to exclude emotion and imagination from our acting. Actors and actresses who naturally possess these high and rare gifts are left unpractised,

and never attain to a convincing expression of them.

The eavesdropping convention encourages slovenly and careless elocution. How many pieces of great emotional and imaginative acting have we seen on the English stage in the last ten years? And what hope is there for an emotional and imaginative drama without a correspondent method and spirit in our actors?

However, the dramatist who wishes to be successful will cheerfully accept the current convention of his day, and will work loyally within it, giving it what further development and twist he may, according to his strength and experience.

You will notice that the following play easily accepts the eavesdropping convention, with its severe economy of scene, action, and personages. Nothing happens that could not very well have happened at Highgate, and in the time and sequence set down. I carefully repudiate any claim to merit on this account. I have done it merely to humour those playgoers who suppose that the practice of our eavesdropping convention necessarily implies the possession of greater and finer powers of construction than the practice of the Shakespearean convention with its thirteen scenes in one act. The merest comparison of the two conventions will show that the modern one denies to the author all possibility of representing a great and varied range of characters in a great and varied scheme of present action.

Under the eavesdropping convention the author

may crowd his three or four half-hour acts with rapid and unnatural sequences such as are plainly impossible. But in this case he sacrifices all credibility and verisimilitude of action, and probably sacrifices all truthfulness and delicacy of character. This method has been wholly rejected by our modern stage in comedy and serious drama, and has been largely rejected in farce.

Or he may economise in both action and character. He may choose a story with a slight and simple action. He may a little unduly indulge his personages in the inveterate habit people have on the stage of dropping in ; and he may a little hurry up his meagre events in a sequence which on examination is as unlike real life as melodrama itself, but which his adroit handling has shaped into a plausible and superficial resemblance to real life.

This is the formula which has given us the most successful plays of the last twenty years.

But suppose a dramatist wishes to do something more than present the trivial actualities of the drawing-room and the street. Suppose he wishes to tell his audience all that is interesting and worth knowing in the history and characters of personages whom he has chosen because they have led varied and eventful lives, and have characters of deep and wide significance. Obviously the eavesdropping convention, in its present stage of development, is a terribly limiting one to the dramatist who has such an aim.

And it offers scarcely any opportunity to literature. Its curt, bald, colloquial shorthand method is con-

temptuous of literature. Literature is discursive, opulent, abounding, leisurely. It abominates shorthand.

I have lately read a printed copy of a current interesting and deservedly successful play. The dialogue was quite natural, sincere, unforced : free from knotted paradox and pinchbeck epigram ; free from petty smartness, and the small fun of the cheap comic paper. But scarcely a line in the whole play was worth saying or worth remembering. It was as unsuggestive and unadorned as the talk one might overhear in a strictly disciplined city office.

Now all great comedies and great dramas, besides being good actable plays, do hold their permanent place on the stage by virtue of saying something worth saying in a manner that makes it worth hearing, and heeding, and dwelling upon ; that is, by virtue of being pieces of literature. Sheridan's comedy remains, not because it has nature and truth, but because it is the vehicle of brilliant and memorable and distinguished conversation.

In spite of much good solid honest work that has lately been done under the eavesdropping convention, will even one example of it take rank in English literature, and be continually read and played ? Will not its shorthand method, which is its chief merit in our eyes to-day, condemn all its works to perish very quickly ?

But the eavesdropping convention is at present firmly established on our modern stage. In a recent play of mine I deliberately intruded an aside, as a legitimate instrument for the revelation of character in a

personage who wants to tell the audience what he is thinking while other people are on the stage. I was met with the blank surprise of the actress who had to speak it. The eavesdropping convention being the current one of our day, it is not wise to confuse simple-minded actresses and playgoers by introducing such startling novelties as the aside and the soliloquy. Let us then accept the eavesdropping convention, or any other convention that happens to be the least disturbing to playgoers.

But we have seen that the eavesdropping convention tends to check and banish literature. It has said some brilliant and penetrating things, but it has said them argumentatively, and while it has been saying them it has forgotten that the first business of the drama is to tell an interesting, progressive, and connected story.

Is there any way of developing the eavesdropping convention so as to bring it into closer union with literature, without losing its sincerity and naturalness ; to make it say something worth saying in a manner worth heeding and dwelling upon ; to make it the vehicle of memorable and distinguished conversation ; to do this while it also analyses character, and implicitly tells a natural, probable story ?

Is not this formidable task the next one that lies before English dramatists ? It may be an impossible one. It may be that our eavesdropping convention will never offer any welcome or accommodation to literature. But it seems worth while to make an occasional experiment.

To be successful a new formula is needed. Evidently all the interesting events in the lives of the leading personages, and all the interesting phases and developments of their characters, cannot be crowded into three or four acts of present direct progressive action ; because, as I have already shown, this gives the impression of incredible melodrama, and allows scarcely any delineation of character. Therefore much of the action cannot be instantly and directly presented, but must be obliquely reflected from the past in sustained passages of kindled present emotion, or of kindled present curiosity, or of vivid comment. It is in these passages that literature may find its opportunity ; for in this formula the eavesdropping convention could largely abandon its present curt, bald, choppy sentences. It could, however, retain its present natural and sincere tones and gestures. If such a formula could be established, the English drama could be made, not only to say something worth saying, but to say it in a manner that is worth heeding and dwelling upon ; a play might again be made the vehicle of memorable and brilliant and distinguished conversation, without ceasing to tell a story.

Mr. Walkley has said very truly that the modern drama does not give us the fine and subtle delights and infinite *nuances* of literature ; it does not tell us all we want to know about the most interesting people ; and what it does tell us, it generally tells us in a crude and superficial way.

Now many of the delights of literature, the drama can never pretend to give. But in the past the

drama has given us some of the highest and rarest delights of literature. To be worth lasting consideration a play must give us some literary delight.

The formula I have suggested, if it could be developed and perfected so as to become the accepted formula for serious work on our stage, would give the dramatist some of the novelist's freedom in dealing with shades and subtleties of character. If men of letters who want to write plays would take the time and trouble to master its difficulties, it would give them a worthy means of expressing themselves in the theatre. If our present eavesdropping convention is to be retained, the formula that I am here suggesting is the only one that will afford to English literature anything more than a casual momentary union with the modern English drama.

To be successful such a type of play needs quite a small theatre. We have several such theatres in London ; and the Little Theatre which Mr. Winthrop Ames has built in New York is a cosy, jewelled chapel for intellectual drama.

Such a play needs to be launched before a specially trained, cultivated, leisurely, and sympathetic audience. It would be courting failure to offer it to a haphazard first-night audience, with no preparation and foregained knowledge of it.

The success of every play largely depends upon a receptive preparedness in the audience. I sauntered one day into a Quaker meeting-house and found there an accomplished negro minstrel playing the banjo to an audience of devout Turks, who supposed

themselves to be in the Mosque of Saint Sophia. The man played the banjo exquisitely, and the Turks were in a most blessed receptive condition ; but there was an air of irrelevancy about the proceedings. The minstrel complained to me afterwards that he could not get into touch with his audience. This same misfortune befell the Hebrew prophets, and myself also when " Michael and His Lost Angel " was produced, though I had not suspected any irrelevancy between the play and a Lyceum audience. However, a sound booing and hissing soon brought it home to me, and I have since been wary of approaching English playgoers on that level. The Hebrew prophets laid the blame on their audience in somewhat heightened language ; which is what dramatic authors are inclined to do when this irrelevancy occurs between their plays and playgoers.

Again, the type of play I am here suggesting needs a company of actors and actresses who have a sympathetic apprehension of its aims, and who have so far exercised themselves in the necessary technique of their art as to be able to give point, variety, and natural fluency to continuous dignified speech.

The late Sir William Gilbert used to say that we have not half a dozen actors or actresses on the English stage who can effectively and arrestingly deliver a speech of thirty lines, so as to avoid giving the impression that the author is a talkative bore. I have never noticed any sign of boredom in an audience when Sir Charles Wyndham has been delivering a long speech ; and I feel sure that a careful search and some

years of training would reveal at least five other English actors and actresses who might venture to accept Gilbert's most unkind challenge with some degree of assurance.

Such a type of play is scarcely likely to be immediately successful with the great body of theatre-goers. But if it could be perfected in form and nursed into popularity, it is a type of play that our advanced playgoers might be proud of having adopted and encouraged. For it is a type of play that easily lends itself to the expression of ideas.

And here, perhaps, is a fitting place to inquire what is the legitimate function of ideas in the drama.

A drama without ideas is empty and sterile. That we all allow. But a drama that sets out to exploit and enforce ideas and opinions is of the nature of a political caucus, and ends by grinding out wind. Ideas should be posted all along the line of action, and should lurk there unsuspectedly, like spies and sappers and secret messengers of thought. Ideas should be the servants of the action. They should never control the action. They should never give marching orders.

A dramatist will be wise to choose a well-tempered, well-trained main idea ; one that has been broken in, and will submit to being saddled and bridled, so that he can ride it on a loose and careless rein, with no danger of getting his neck broken by a fall, while the idea capers off and runs amuck on its own account. The field of the modern drama is strewn with disabled riders who have hastily mounted raw

wild colts of ideas, and never got home with them, but lie crippled and groaning while their ideas are aimlessly kicking and stampeding the country. Even Brieux, brave knight, fearless champion, practised horseman, rarely rides home in triumph, but generally returns afoot, dragging his steed after him. But he does get home.

Some dramatists are so enamoured of ideas that instead of riding them, they offer them a back, and beseech their ideas to mount them and scour the broad land. Wisdom hails them in vain, nor will they heed any warning from this small weak voice.

But by all means let us have ideas in the theatre. I have peppered the following pages with a few of them. I would not have dared to offer a play to you without some infusion of ideas. I hope they will be found to blend naturally with the action of the play.

If they do not, they may perhaps be accepted as evidence of my earnest desire to please those advanced playgoers who have adopted as their motto, "Cut the hosses, and get on to the cackle."

The type of play we have under consideration would therefore meet with your approval, inasmuch as it allows the introduction of ideas. And it calls on literature to smelt and solidify these ideas, and give them a permanent form so that they may become operative. Ideas have no long-carrying force and sway unless they are compact with literature. They merely evaporate and wander into air. It was because the ideas of Burke and Rousseau and Voltaire were compact with literature that they became and remained operative.

Now undoubtedly there is a very considerable demand on our stage for ideas, but there is small or no demand for literature. Who reads our plays? What weight and respect have they in the artistic and intellectual life of the nation? On a first night how many playgoers watch if the dialogue which pleases and tickles them has any permanent quality in it, or even, indeed, if it is passable English?

Therefore such a type of play to be successful eminently needs the counterpane of vogue.

Every play, like every human character, has many defects. The greater the man, the greater his virtues and achievements, the greater, it is most probable, are his vices and faults. The greater the play, the larger its aim, the newer its form, the weightier its substance, the more defects it is likely to have. What holes can be picked in *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*! And by the law of public presentation these defects are searched for by a thousand eyes on every first night, and unless they are cloaked by the counterpane of vogue, they are apt to be more apparent than the virtues and excellences.

O the good thick warm counterpane of vogue! How hardly shall a success be won for English literature on the English stage outside its comfortable folds!

These considerations have led me to offer this play as an English man of letters before offering it to managers and to playgoers.

The play is meant to be played whenever there appears to be a public demand for it. In the meantime

have I not done managers a good turn by removing from them all temptation to risk their money and the prestige of their theatre upon it? Have I not done some hundreds or thousands of playgoers a good turn by refusing to drag them from their firesides, or to detach them from attendance at some other theatre, where they were likely to be amused or interested by less taxing means and methods? Have I not done the actors and actresses a good turn by allowing them a temporary respite from Sir William Gilbert's ordeal? Especially have I not done some leading actress a good turn in not asking her to lower her dignity by appearing in a play where it is plain the leading man's part is by far the better one? And have I not done some leading actor a good turn in not asking him to lower his dignity by appearing in a play where it is equally plain that the leading lady's part is by far the better one?

Then there is the Censor. He has censored Sophocles, Shelley, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Brieux, Shaw. Who knows whether he might not censor me? Who knows—least of all himself—what and whom he may or may not censor? Have I not done him a good turn in refusing for the present to impale him on the horns of his eternal dilemma? There is some reason to suspect that in this instance I have spared him the trouble of calling together that dread conclave whom he calls his "Advisory Committee," and of going through the solemn farce, either of censoring a play that in three years the playgoing public will force him to license, or of calling redoubled attention

to a fugitive fiasco that without his interference would have been forgotten in three weeks.

Then there are the critics. I will ask them whether three out of the four evenings they now spend at the theatre might not be more amusingly and less irritatingly spent in that kind of holy downward personal contemplation which a Buddhist sect finds so consoling? It is for them to say. But at least the practice I am here advocating of first publishing all plays intended for public representation would ease the critics of some part of the intolerable burden of attending every first performance given at some thirty or forty London theatres. Why should not so kindly and time-saving a custom become usual amongst us? In any case, with the present impossibility of giving anything like ample treatment to play and acting and scenery, and doing justice to himself in the short hour now allowed him after representation, a critic might reasonably say to an author, "Print your play and let me have a copy a week or two before production. If I find it worth serious attention, I may perhaps drop in at the theatre and have a look at it. If it isn't worth serious attention in the study, it cannot be worth very prolonged and serious attention in the theatre." And if the author demurred that the interest would then be gone on the first night, it would be a confession that his play depended for success either upon theatrical surprises and devices, or upon the vogue and personality of the actors, and that in his own opinion it had no lasting intrinsic merit of its own.

Further, am I not doing a good turn to authors in urging the general publication of a play prior to representation? And here I am not speaking of authors who are necessarily compelled to publish because they have no hope of public representation, but also of those authors whose plays have already an assured and announced production. Amongst the many factors that unite to make an immediate theatrical success, what are the chiefly potent and operative ones? I will try to put them in their order so far as my own experience may guide me.

1. The vogue of the leading actor or actress, apart from his talent.
2. The vogue of the theatre.
3. The vogue of the author, apart from his present work. Vogue will never save a bad uninteresting play, but it will keep limping it on. And it will cover the defects of a good play, which without it would be wrecked on minor points, or die before it secured popular attention. "Arms and the Man" was hissed on its first production, and might have been lost to the stage if its author had not got possession of the counterpane.
4. The personality of the leading actor, or actress, getting a chance to express itself in a striking way, in a striking and suitable character.
5. Capable and dovetailing stage management.
6. The novelty or sudden popularity of the theme.
7. A smooth ensemble of intelligent and sympathetic representation.
8. A happy relevancy of mood and taste in the

first-night audience. It is useless to play the banjo exquisitely to a band of devout Turks in a Quaker meeting-house.

9. The weather ; the absence of any public distraction or calamity ; the absence from any other theatres of any pronounced success of a play of a similar class.

10. The desire of playgoers to see any play that is talked about ; their frantic crush to get into any theatre whose seats are booked against them ; their sheep-like impulse to do what and go where the other sheep are doing and going. When I was a boy tending my father's sheep, as I drove them along, some old bell-wether would take it into his head suddenly to jump five feet high and six feet wide over a three-inch trickling ditch. Every sheep, as it came up, would jump exactly the same height and distance. How often do we see the public jumping for months together five feet high over a three-inch puddle !

11, 12, 13. Heaven knows what.

14. The author's bare work, apart from his reputation and vogue ; his actual manuscript as it is in the hands of the prompter at the wings every evening.

It will be said that in showing that the author's actual work counts so little for success I have proved too much. No, I have merely shown another reason that we have no English national drama. According to the view that is taken of the relative importance of the drama and the theatre, and according to the class of play, it may be urged, on the one hand, that the author's work is an almost negligible factor, or, on

the other hand, that it is the supreme and dominating factor. Unquestionably, in plays that are worth serious consideration the author's work should be the supreme and dominating factor, as it always becomes in the final judgment of a play—if there is any final judgment, after the first theatrical success or failure. What I am here concerned to establish, is the fact that unless a modern play gets its correct method of interpretation by actors with the right personalities, trained in its own school, the author's work and aims are not seen, and cannot be judged in the theatre. They are obscured by the primary thirteen factors which on our modern stage make for theatrical success, and which should be secondary and auxiliary.

Yet the author is always blamed and held accountable for a failure. Take the hundreds and thousands of plays that have been produced during the last twenty years at London theatres. Read all the notices. Is there any single known instance when the actors and representation have been blamed for a failure? Yet out of all the thousands of cases, there must surely have been some few where they have been responsible for the failure of good work. But if favourite actors are seen working hard and doing their best, it is always judged that they have conveyed the author's exact intention, and given a full and correct interpretation of the play.

I shall doubtless be severely challenged on this point. All the factors are so variable and complex, and the opinions formed of them are so multitudinous and conflicting, that it would be impossible to prove

my contention in the case of any individual modern play without presenting it anew in several differing ways.

But I may point to the fact that the same play—"Hamlet," "The Winter's Tale," "Twelfth Night," "Othello," "The School for Scandal," to say nothing of countless modern plays—has met with enormous success or abject failure according to the different circumstances and conditions which have governed the individual production. The individual production which has failed has apparently been guided by equal taste, forethought, and enthusiasm as the production which has met with enormous success. The play has been interpreted by actors apparently as skilled, and of as good a reputation. In both productions the author's work has remained constant. Yet one production has met with great success; the other with total failure. So it must be granted that it is the attendant circumstances and conditions rather than the author's work which determine the success of a play in the theatre. In the case of an old and well-known play, the author is not blamed, because the play has already proved itself to be a stage success. But in the case of a modern play the author is always blamed, and has no means of showing that the failure was due to faults and caprices of production; or to its not having received a representation, appropriate to his class of work, and coincident with his methods. I am speaking now of work that has serious pretensions, and whose success entitles a country to claim that it has a live national drama,

Again, if any unoccupied person with no better way of wasting his time will take the trouble to read a large number of modern plays that have failed, and compare them with an equal number of modern plays that have succeeded, he will be driven to the conclusion that the actual work of the author is often no better, either from the literary or the theatrical standpoint, in the plays that have triumphantly succeeded than in the plays that have dismally failed. That is to say the author is mainly judged, not by his work, but upon a consensus of favourable or unfavourable conditions which are out of his control.

For these reasons I think that in advocating the publication of plays prior to their production, I may claim that I am doing a good turn to those authors who wish for a thoughtful consideration, and a well-founded estimate of the permanent value of their work. Of course publication will never protect from failure any play, or any individual production of a play, that has in it no germ of potential success in the theatre. But publication does afford the best and easiest means of winnowing the wheat from the chaff, and of judging whether a play has any claims to serious consideration, that is to rank as literature. What pride can English dramatists take in their art, what rank can they claim for their calling while a shrewd collector of first editions can taunt them with the fact that in possessing the first editions of Sheridan's and Goldsmith's plays he has garnered all the harvest of the English drama for two centuries?

Further, publication, either before or after produc-

tion, cannot be shown to have damaged the success of any play on the boards; rather, indeed, it may claim in some instances to have secured or assisted a following theatrical production. Therefore I think it must be conceded that I am also doing a good turn to dramatic authors.

Thus it appears that in publishing this play before offering it to managers and the public I have incidentally done a good turn to everybody connected with the theatre and the drama; to managers, playgoers, actors and actresses, to the Censor of plays and his advisory committee, to dramatic critics, and to dramatic authors. I am amazed to discover that I am possessed of such a vast amount of all-round benevolence.

In our judgment of acting we have an amiable unwritten rule which runs to the effect that if any actor is found to be kind to his mother; or to possess an agreeable social manner; or if he is a manager; or if he modestly boasts that he always produces plays with a glaringly high moral or religious purpose; or if he prints his name in very large letters—he may on any of these counts be forgiven for showing us a reasonable amount of bad acting. I hope that this charitable rule of judgment may in time be so far widened as to include dramatic authors within its scope, and I humbly suggest that such a vast amount of all-round benevolence as I have here displayed may plead for my forgiveness if I have written a bad play.

I fear it will have occurred to you that this over-

flowing benevolence of mine might very well have been extended so far as to spare you this dedication. And that way my natural goodness of heart inclined me. But rumours of my demise have been spread on both sides of the Atlantic. There is considerable uncertainty about the matter, so much so that, as you see, I have become infected with doubt myself. I hope, therefore, you will excuse me for taking this opportunity of again submitting the question to your better judgment.

And, further, the practice of dedicating a play to some distinguished man of letters is one that might profitably be adopted in our English theatre. In this way the English drama and English literature might become better acquainted with each other. The English theatre might learn what English literature is like; English literature might learn what the English theatre is like. It is impossible to say whose eyes would be the widest opened, but some enlightenment could not fail to follow on both sides. Every English playwright would have his correspondent English man of letters whom he would hold as a kind of patron saint—in all questions that relate to literature. Every English man of letters would have his trusty dependent playwright by his side, ready to tender opportune little hints upon all matters connected with the theatre.

I forbear to indicate what individual man of letters is suitable to each individual playwright. But I plead very earnestly that Mr. Birrell may be given another chance.

I find that I have not yet given you any sufficient reason for accepting the dedication of this play. I feel sure you would agree with me in thinking that English plays should be worthy the approval and acceptance of English scholars and men of letters. On this narrow basis of accord in a very general maxim, and not on the plea that I am here offering you something of present or lasting worth, I once more beg your permission to put your name at the head of this preface.

I repeat the play is meant to be acted. Without more ado, I push it off into the crowded stream of printed matter to find what harbourage or sinking place it may.

With great respect and admiration, and with many apologies for my recalcitrant vitality,

I am,

Faithfully yours,

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

P.S. Et Fragonard?

THE DIVINE GIFT

CHARACTERS

ANDREW CUTLER

GEORGE NORTON

WILL JANWAY

JOHN TREGANZA

SECCOMBE

SANDFORD

LORA DELMAR

EVIE JANWAY

The scene is laid throughout in the study of Cutler's house at Highgate. The time is the present. The First Act takes place on a morning in November; the Second, on the evening of the same day; the Third, on an evening in early June of the following year.

ACT I

SCENE: ANDREW CUTLER's *very tastefully and carefully furnished study in an eighteenth-century house at Highgate*. Wide French windows have been inserted in the wall at back, opening upon a balcony which looks immediately upon an old garden, and beyond the garden wall upon the wooded landscape that lies north-westward of London. Towards the back on the right side is a door. In the left-hand corner at back is a small curtained space with a wash-basin and towels. Near the audience in the wall on the left is an Adam's fireplace. Above it, fronting the audience, is a large comfortable old sofa. A flat writing-table is down on the right side, with an arm-chair placed to it on its right. The floor is almost covered by a rich Eastern carpet. The entire wall space is occupied by book-shelves containing well-bound volumes of all sizes and descriptions, such as would be found in the library of a man with cultivated literary tastes. All the furniture is of the best period in the eighteenth century. The room has nothing in it that is not beautiful or tasteful; it is not crowded, and gives an impression of unobtrusive richness and comfort. The time is near noon on a dull November morning. A bright fire is burning. The windows at back

are closed, and the outside wintry landscape is dimly seen through a light grey mist.

Discover ANDREW CUTLER and SECCOMBE, his secretary.

CUTLER is a distinguished-looking, intellectual Englishman about sixty ; his features are regular, refined and sharp ; his complexion is rather pale ; his eyes are bright and piercing, and a little sunk under a fine unwrinkled forehead ; his hair is silver-grey, his eyebrows silver-grey and a little bushy ; he is well-built and well-preserved ; of medium height. He is always well dressed. This morning he wears an easy silk smoking-jacket and fine embroidered slippers. He is walking diagonally across the room, smoking a cigar ; dictating to SECCOMBE.

SECCOMBE is seated at the writing-table taking down CUTLER's sentences in shorthand. SECCOMBE is a short, dry, thick-set man about forty-five, with stolid features, and a laconic, stolid manner ; coarse, sandy-grey hair, bald on the top ; rather slovenly dress ; he speaks slowly and rather gruffly with a cultivated accent. He is evidently on a footing of social equality with CUTLER.

CUTLER. [Walking, dictating.] “The present rebellion of women and the present rebellion of labour throughout the civilised world, may therefore be classed together as a twin revolt against the detestable and tyrannical conditions which misguided Nature has for the moment imposed upon the human species.”

SECCOMBE. [*Writing.*] "Species."

CUTLER. "This twin revolt is wholly reasonable and wholly just. For what can be more unreasonable or more unjust than to demand from any cultured, self-respecting miner that he should toil and sweat in darkness and filth for eight or even for four hours daily, while other members of the same society are talking philosophy, or flirting with agreeable persons over coffee and cigars."

SECCOMBE. [*Looking up.*] Aren't you cutting the irony a little too fine?

CUTLER. Impossible. Irony is a trap. You must always bait it so slyly that the fools swallow their purge and think it's sugar-candy. Joab kissed Abner as he smote him under the fifth rib. That's irony. Go on, Seccombe. [*Walking about, dictating.*] "Again, what can be more unreasonable, more unjust, more viciously one-sided than that only one-half of human kind, and this the weaker and more delicate sex, should be called upon to endure the agony of that other labour, whereby Nature has so carelessly and clumsily contrived that our race should be renewed."

SECCOMBE. [*Writing.*] "Renewed."

CUTLER. [*Warming a little with his theme.*] "Moreover, this twin revolt is seen to be inevitable, and will be perpetual from the moment that labourers and women reach the lower standards of education prescribed in our Government schools. This rebellion will not subside under our present conditions. Least of all will it be frightened into silence by the ancient spectres of Duty and Religion. Clergymen and

moralists may be entreated to pack up their venerable bogies." [Pause.]

SECCOMBE. *[Writing.]* "Bogies."

CUTLER. *[Dictating.]* "For it is clear that to-day the whole Religion of labour is to throw down its tools. And the whole Duty of woman is to rebel——"

[Enter SANDFORD, announcing.]

SANDFORD. Mrs. Janway.

[CUTLER shows slight annoyance at being disturbed.]

[Enter EVIE JANWAY. Exit SANDFORD.]

[EVIE is a very pretty, well-dressed woman of about twenty-seven, with small bewitching features, and an elegant figure, wrapped in expensive furs.]

EVIE. Good-morning, Guardy. [Kissing him.]

CUTLER. Good-morning, my dear.

EVIE. Good-morning, Mr. Seccombe.

SECCOMBE. Good-morning.

EVIE. *[To CUTLER.]* Don't tell me you're busy, because you mustn't be, just now.

CUTLER. I was just giving down an article.

EVIE. It can wait for half an hour? I'm sure it can.

CUTLER. *[With a little rueful look at SECCOMBE.]* Seccombe, would you mind stepping into the next room?

SECCOMBE. Certainly.

[Exit.]

CUTLER. I thought you'd gone back to Oakminster.

EVIE. So we did.

CUTLER. Up in town again ?

EVIE. Yes.

CUTLER. You seem to be having a good time of it.

EVIE. [Bitterly.] You think so ? [With conviction.] Guardy, there isn't a more miserable woman in London than I am.

CUTLER. [Looks at her for a moment.] Well, appearances are deceptive.

EVIE. But I am ; utterly miserable, utterly wretched.

CUTLER. Been having another tiff with Will ?

EVIE. Tiff ? We had a final quarrel the night before last, and a final understanding yesterday morning.

CUTLER. Then matters have reached a stable equilibrium ?

EVIE. Please don't chaff me. I've come to you as my guardian, because I feel sure your sympathies will be on my side. [She looks at him covertly; he does not reply.] Aren't they ? [Goes to him very affectionately; throws him a pretty, bewitching look of entreaty.] They ought to be.

CUTLER. Certainly, my dear ; of course my sympathies are on your side. [EVIE kisses him affectionately.] Now, this quarrel with Will—what's it all about ?

EVIE. Stanislas Karlinski and Madame Schneberger were giving a concert at Oakminster the night before last. So I booked places for Will and myself, went up to their hotel, and got them to promise to dine with us before the concert. I told Will we should have to sit down punctually at a quarter to

seven, and asked him to get home from the factory and dress in time. Well, a quarter to seven came, and no Will. So we sat down—just four or five dainty little courses. At a quarter past seven, Will turned up with Mr. and Mrs. Pumphrey—all in morning dress.

CUTLER. Who are the Pumphreys?

EVIE. Business friends of Will's, rolling in money—the dullest and stupidest old fossils. Think of the British Museum, think of "God Save the King," think of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and you've got the Pumphreys.

CUTLER. I've got them.

EVIE. Don't you think it was in very bad taste of Will to bring people like the Pumphreys to meet Stanislas Karlinski and Schneberger?

CUTLER. He certainly oughtn't to bring people to dinner without letting you know.

EVIE. He did it simply to annoy me, and humiliate me before my friends.

CUTLER. Oh, I can't think that of Will.

EVIE. But he did. He knows my sensitive nature; and he constantly does things like that, merely for the pleasure of seeing me writhe and quiver. I feel like some poor, frightened little bird in the grasp of a cruel boy.

CUTLER. You don't look like it.

EVIE. [Looks at him.] Ah, my dear Guardy, you've only seen the outside of my married life!

CUTLER. Well, about this dinner—what did you do?

EVIE. I made the best of it, as I always do. I explained the situation to Karlinski and Schneberger in French, and apologized to them. Will immediately contradicted me in English, and apologized for me to the Pumphreys.

CUTLER. What happened then?

EVIE. After that I let things take their course. When I tried to make myself agreeable to Mrs. Pumphrey, Will sat and scowled at Stanislas Karlinski. When I asked the servants to hurry with our soufflé, Will told them to bring up the cold veal-and-ham pie. Can you imagine the situation?

CUTLER. Faintly. What was the sequel?

EVIE. I passed it off quite amiably for the time, knowing that I should see Will alone when I came back from the concert.

CUTLER. And you did!

EVIE. Yes. When I got home the Pumphreys were just going. So I said "Good-night" to them very pleasantly and then— [Pause.]

CUTLER. Then there was what old-fashioned playwrights call a *scène-à-faire*?

EVIE. No, I didn't make a scene.

CUTLER. You carefully avoided it, as our modern dramatists do?

EVIE. [Very reproachfully.] Guard, I've thrown myself upon your sympathy at the supreme crisis of my life. You must please take me seriously.

CUTLER. I will, my dear, I will. Then after the Pumphreys had gone, you didn't make a scene?

EVIE. Not at first. All through the concert I was schooling myself to keep my temper, because I felt sure that would make Will lose his. I never feel myself so superior to Will as when he's raging and shouting, and I'm calm and dignified.

CUTLER. How did Will take it?

EVIE. He wanted to sulk off to bed.

CUTLER. Rather mean of him. You didn't let him?

EVIE. No. I said a few cutting satirical things about the Pumphreys—

CUTLER. That drew him?

EVIE. Yes. He turned round on me, and stamped and shouted and swore—you never saw such a scene.

CUTLER. You kept calm and dignified?

EVIE. Yes. I was quite patient under it all, till he began to abuse my friends. That roused me. People may attack me as much as they please, and I remain silent. But the moment they attack my friends, all my better instincts flame up. And when he called Stanislas a "greasy fiddler"—

CUTLER. You remained silent no longer?

EVIE. No, I told him exactly what I thought of all his friends and relations—particularly his Aunt Julia.

CUTLER. His Aunt Julia?

EVIE. She's a confirmed gin-drinker! Actually goes out to a public-house in her dressing-gown to get it.

CUTLER. Aunt Julia was a clinching argument. I hope Will had the decency to shut up after Aunt Julia.

EVIE. No. He raked out everything against my relations, and against everybody I had ever brought into the house. He bullied and raved, and threw a glass of whisky over my new white satin dress.

CUTLER. That was wasting good whisky and satin. Still he'll have to pay for both. How did the situation develop after that?

EVIE. He almost struck me——

CUTLER. Almost?

EVIE. Well, he shook me. I called out for help, and then one of my fainting attacks came on. Instead of trying to bring me to, he sneaked off to bed, not knowing whether I was alive or dead. When I came to, I was alone. It was a quarter to two, so I staggered up to my own room as best I could. Don't you think it was brutal of him to leave me in that condition?

CUTLER. It wasn't very considerate. However, you had a thorough understanding yesterday morning?

EVIE. Yes. We discussed it quite calmly, and came up to town last night.

CUTLER. Will's in town, is he?

EVIE. Yes, he has gone to a lawyer's——

CUTLER. What for?

EVIE. To arrange for our divorce.

CUTLER. Divorce? On what ground?

EVIE. General grounds. We aren't the least suited to each other.

CUTLER. Yes, but that ground would automatically dissolve nine marriages out of ten. Incompatibility of mental and social atmosphere? My dear Evie,

you can't get a divorce for that, even in these easy-going days.

EVIE. Oh yes, we can. Will has arranged to desert me. My lawyer will apply for a restitution of conjugal rights. Will won't obey the order of the Court. He'll take somebody down to Brighton and let my lawyers know. I shall bring a petition, and my lawyers will prove that the Brighton lady wasn't me. That's all. It's quite the recognised thing.

CUTLER. Yes, I know. But I shan't recognise it. And I should have thought you would find it a very unpleasant business to be mixed up in.

EVIE. Oh, I shan't be mixed up in it, except just to go down to the Court. Will has to settle all the details.

CUTLER. Oh, that falls to the man ?

EVIE. Of course ! You wouldn't expect the woman to degrade herself. [*Coming up to him affectionately.*] Now, Guardy, you aren't going to be disagreeable and try to prevent my getting my liberty ?

CUTLER. I shan't let you go through the Divorce Court, if I can help it. My dear Evie, you surely can't mean this. You have what most women would consider a very enviable lot—a tolerably good husband as husbands go, a pretty home, a handsome income ; you come up to town every few weeks ; you go everywhere, see everything ; you've nothing to do but enjoy yourself. You ought to be happy.

EVIE. Ought to be happy ? Of course I ought ! No woman has a greater natural capacity for happiness than I have. Then why am I so miserable ?

CUTLER. Happiness is a by-product. It's a deposit thrown down from work and duty. Do your duty fearlessly and your work thoroughly, and life secretes a residuum of happiness.

EVIE. It hasn't secreted any residuum in my case.

CUTLER. What about the work and duty? It's evidently your duty to go back to Will and make him a good wife. Come! He isn't a bad sort. Many women would be glad to have such a husband.

EVIE. Oh, I don't deny that Will has some good qualities. He would have made an excellent husband to a woman on his own level. And [*with great conviction*] what a splendid wife I should have made, if I had happened to find the right man!

CUTLER. What sort of a man would that be?

EVIE. One who could enter into all my aspirations, and share my love of art and beauty; surround me with congenial friends, instead of such people as the Pumphreys; encourage me to develop my own natural gifts, to do something great, be something great—how I could have worshipped such a man!

CUTLER. Such a man as—? For instance, among your old acquaintances, whom would you have chosen for a husband? Tom Standish?

EVIE. Oh, he thinks of nothing but himself. He smokes the best cigars, and lets his wife travel third class.

CUTLER. Lorry Baxenden?

EVIE. No, he thinks of nothing but his tailor.

CUTLER. Jim Crawshay?

EVIE. No, I should have to come second to his horses and dogs. I must be first or nowhere.

CUTLER. Roger Fennell?

EVIE. [Disgusted.] Oh no! He always paws you. I can't bear to be pawed.

CUTLER. Dr. Kernshaw?

EVIE. Oh, I couldn't be a doctor's wife! Their work is so revolting. I should always be seeing operations.

CUTLER. Well, whom shall we say? Take your own choice.

EVIE. I've often pictured the man—

CUTLER. But you've never met him?

EVIE. No, but he exists. One day I shall meet him.

CUTLER. Not on this terrestrial sphere, my dear Evie. Meantime I should advise you to put up with Will as a makeshift.

EVIE. No, my dear Guardy. Will and I discussed it, and we have made up our minds for a divorce.

CUTLER. And then? What's your next step?

EVIE. I'm going out to Switzerland for the time—

CUTLER. While Will, like a good husband, stays at home and gets the divorce?

EVIE. Yes.

CUTLER. Well, you'll have the best of him there. What are you going to do in Switzerland?

EVIE. I'm going to find some restful, secluded place in the High Alps, where I can see things clearly, and map out some great future for myself.

CUTLER. What particular kind of great future?

EVIE. I can't say. I've made one terrible mistake in life. I mustn't make a second.

CUTLER. No, you mustn't. But I've noticed that when women forsake their natural vocation of love-making, they generally take up with something far less agreeable—parsons, nursing, slumming, female suffrage, dumb animals. Mrs. Leverett has tried them all, and now, instead of keeping a home for one husband, she keeps a home for forty cats.

EVIE. I shall not choose any ordinary vocation.

CUTLER. No?

EVIE. I could be quite content to inspire some man, if he, on his side, would share his fame with me, and let it be known that he owes it all to me.

CUTLER. Why not inspire Will?

EVIE. Inspire Will? He is a carpet manufacturer.

CUTLER. Inspire him to make better carpets.

EVIE. [Looks at him reproachfully.] Dear kind Guardy, do please take me seriously. Do please realize that I am in earnest. I long to inspire a man to write some great poem, to paint some great picture! And you calmly tell me to inspire my husband!

CUTLER. Oh, I know other women's husbands offer the best raw material for inspiration. But that leads to difficulties. My young friend Dick Wilby got Mrs. Fitchell to inspire him to write his novels. Mrs. Wilby didn't like it, and now Dick has to pay his wife a thousand a year alimony; his books don't sell, and he's saddled with Mrs. Fitchell in a Bloomsbury lodging-house. And not a farthing's worth of inspiration can he get out of her.

EVIE. I should not enter into immoral relations with the man whom I inspire.

CUTLER. You wouldn't wish him to be your lover?

EVIE. Not in the objectionable sense. Romney was not Lady Hamilton's lover.

CUTLER. No. I believe their relations were quite proper. Like those of Dante and Beatrice.

EVIE. That is how I would prefer them to be. Then I should know his devotion to be thoroughly unselfish.

CUTLER. Rather hard on the poor fellow, not to throw him in some little bonus, eh?

EVIE. I must respect the man whom I inspire. And he must respect me.

CUTLER. Well, my dear Evie, I don't think there is much of a career for you as an inspirer. You'll find it very difficult to catch your inspiree. Better try some other walk in life.

EVIE. Of course I would much rather make a name on my own account. And now that I am free, there are so many paths before me.

CUTLER. Such as—

EVIE. All the arts are open to me.

CUTLER. Yes, that's the best of the arts—they're always open to everybody.

EVIE. And I love them all! Painting, sculpture, literature—I wish you'd read the first chapter of a novel I've written—the stage, music—you're devoted to music—wouldn't you wish to see your little Evie a great musician?

CUTLER. Nothing would please me better. But—

EVIE. Now, you're not to discourage me. [With intense conviction.] Guardy, I feel, I know, I've got it in me—here! [Striking her fist on her breast.]

CUTLER. We've all got it in us ! The bother is, it won't come out. The artist has got it in him, and manages to bring it out. That's the difference between us and the artist.

EVIE. The difference between you and the artist, you mean ! [With intense conviction.] I mean to bring it out ! It's here ! [Striking her breast.] It shall come out ! I want to meet Lora Delmar again.

CUTLER. What for ?

EVIE. I think I shall decide upon music, and I should like to talk over my future with her. She's a great friend of yours, isn't she ?

CUTLER. I used to see a good deal of her three or four years ago, when George Norton and she first came together. Lately, I haven't seen so much of her. That night when you and Will met her here at dinner is the only time I've seen her for months.

EVIE. Couldn't you ask her here to meet me ? I scarcely had any chance of speaking to her that night. Everybody wanted to monopolise her. I can't understand it !

CUTLER. What ?

EVIE. Why, everybody raves about her.

CUTLER.. She has a rare and beautiful personality, and a rare and beautiful voice. She's an actress who can sing, and a singer who can act.

EVIE. Yes, but other people can sing and act, and have rare and beautiful personalities. Really, I don't see why all the world should go mad about her ! There's a Lora Delmar aeroplane, and a Lora Delmar handbag, and they've just brought out a Mousse Lora Delmar at the Ritz. Guardy, answer me one question ?

CUTLER. Well?

EVIE. Why is that woman allowed to have nothing but triumph and adoration and happiness, while I have nothing but misery and disappointment? Why has she got all London at her feet, while I am buried in a dull little hole like Oakminster, amongst people like the Pumphreys?

CUTLER. Ah, now you've got hold of the Philosopher's Puzzle. Why was this world constructed with such a brutal disregard for the wishes of its inhabitants? Why didn't I have the making of it? I should have laid it out as a velvet lounge for working men, and a garden paradise for women. And God has gone and made it so different.

EVIE. And she isn't a good woman. Everybody knows that. George Norton is her lover.

CUTLER. Morality curtsies to great artists.

EVIE. But you don't defend it?

CUTLER. No, I don't defend it. I accept it.

EVIE. And George Norton's wife accepts it?

CUTLER. Oh, George and his wife long ago arrived at an understanding that they should each go their own ways.

EVIE. And society accepts it, and knows all about it, and yet runs after her.

CUTLER. Yes; but not because she lives with George Norton. But because she has a wonderful voice that goes straight to the heart. We are right not to question a great artist, but to accept him. But right or wrong, we all do it. You do it. You

dined with her here the other night, and you want to meet her again.

EVIE. I want to find out why it is she has got this tremendous hold upon everybody. I want to find out her secret.

CUTLER. Ah, don't, my dear Evie. Don't look at the roots.

EVIE. The roots of what?

CUTLER. [Takes up a fine azalea in a pot.] Art is a flower that bursts out in a nation, or an individual, just where the vigour and health of the stem begin to exhaust themselves and die in bloom and perfume. It springs from—[digging up the earth in the pot]. It is nourished by the mud and manure and corruption of life. There's a lot of manure round these roots. Do you want to see it? [Turning up the roots.]

EVIE. [Turns away disgusted.] Oh don't!

CUTLER. [Putting down the azalea.] I'll ask Lora Delmar to meet you, if you wish. But you won't find out much about her.

EVIE. I suppose there's a good deal to be known about her that's very horrid?

CUTLER. There's a good deal to be known about all of us that's very horrid. But it isn't worth knowing.

EVIE. She's married, isn't she?

CUTLER. Her husband died a year or two ago. I never met him. I never met her till George Norton brought her here.

EVIE. They say she has had several lovers.

CUTLER. They say—anything. I don't know what Lora Delmar's life was before she met George Norton.

I do know what the lives of nearly all the supreme artists have been. They make the saddest reading. If you want information on the subject, read the memoirs of Rachel, the great French actress. No, don't. They'd only shock you. Read Matthew Arnold's sonnets to her. Don't dig up the manure round the roots.

EVIE. I don't see any reason why I shouldn't be a great artist, and yet remain a perfectly pure, good, respectable woman.

CUTLER. Very few women can be great artists, or even artists at all. Some women can't even be good and respectable. But I'm quite sure it's far better, and far easier, for any woman to be good and respectable, than to be a great artist.

EVIE. You think it's impossible to be both ?

CUTLER. I won't say it's impossible. And I do know that some of the greatest artists have wrecked their health, shortened their lives, and ruined their best work, by their passions and vices. Perhaps the Puritans were right. Perhaps it's better for a nation to have no art.

EVIE. Well, I've made up my mind to be a great artist. You'll help me, won't you ?

CUTLER. How ?

EVIE. You'll see that Will makes me a comfortable settlement, so that I can start on my artistic career without being worried about money.

CUTLER. I'm not going to help you to get a divorce, my dear Evie.

EVIE. Then we shall have to get it without you.

You know, Guardy, you can't stop us. But it would help me so much if the world knew that I had your sympathy and support.

CUTLER. Suppose you don't bring it off as a great artist?

EVIE. I shall. I know I shall. I've got it here! Guardy, I do think you owe it to me to stand by me now. You allowed me to marry Will, though with your experience you must have seen that with my temperament, I could never be happy with him.

CUTLER. I allowed you to marry Will because I thought you stood about as good a chance of being happy with him as you could expect with any man.

EVIE. Well, you see the result? Five of the best years of my life utterly wasted. Oh, why didn't you warn me?

CUTLER. Against marrying a thoroughly decent healthy young fellow with six thousand a year?

EVIE. And not one single idea in common with me. Don't you think it was a little selfish of you, not to take more care that I married the right man!

CUTLER. My dear, if you remember, you were full of all sorts of whims and fancies. You wanted to be this; you wanted to be that; you wanted to be everything. I thought marriage would be just the thing to cure you.

EVIE. But it hasn't. Marriage has turned out an awful mistake. Well, I won't blame you, if you'll only help me to repair it before it's too late. Don't let me see the years going by, and find myself growing into a

disappointed old woman with all my talents wasted.

CUTLER. [Frankly.] The best thing that could happen to you would be to have a child.

EVIE. [Annoyed and shocked.] Please don't harp on that again. I've already told you so many times that I've decided—

CUTLER. You have decided—?

EVIE. Surely a woman has a right to decide that.

CUTLER. Certainly. But if she doesn't mean to have children, she oughtn't to marry.

EVIE. That's what I think. And, for the future, I want no husband but art.

CUTLER. [Walks up and down a few steps perplexed.] Look here, my dear Evie. You've always wanted to live in London with congenial society. Let me see Will, and persuade him to give up the Oakminster house, get you a pretty little flat in Mayfair, where you can surround yourself with artists and delightful people—

EVIE. No. That would have satisfied me a year ago. It's too late now. I have chosen my path. If I fail, I fail. But I sha'n't fail! I've got it here! [Strikes her breast.]

CUTLER. [Changing his tone to acquiescence.] Very well, my dear. Will's in town—when can he see me?

EVIE. He'll be busy all day arranging the divorce and other things. He said he could dine with you.

CUTLER. George Norton is dining with me to-night. I can't very well put him off, as he wants to see me

about something important. Could Will come here at half-past six ?

EVIE. Yes, I think. I'll send him to you.

CUTLER. Very well. I shall expect him.

EVIE. [Very grateful.] Thank you, dear Guardy.

CUTLER. You aren't going out to Switzerland alone ?

EVIE. No. Stanislas Karlinski has advised me to go to Mary Lambert for voice production. So I shall take her as a companion, and she will train my voice. Stanislas himself is to be out there too.

CUTLER. Oh ! Well, let's hope the High Alps will clarify matters.

EVIE. Oh, it will ! I feel a load is lifted off me. For the first time in my life I can breathe. [Suddenly.] I'm lunching with Gracie Challoner at the Ritz. I must be going. No, don't bother to come to the door with me. [Glancing at watch on wrist,] I must hurry ! Good-bye, dear old Guardy. You'll be sure to make my settlements right with Will ?

CUTLER. I'll do all I can.

EVIE. Thanks. [Kisses him.] [Exit.

CUTLER. [Calls off at the open door.] Seccombe !

[Looks at his hands, which are dirty from the earth in the flower-pot ; turns up his coat sleeves ; opens curtains in corner. A wash-basin is behind them ; he proceeds to wash his hands, leaving curtains apart.

[SECCOMBE enters and seats himself at table.

Sharpens his pencil.

CUTLER. [Washing his hands.] Tiresome hussies, women !

SECCOMBE. They haven't bothered me much since I was twenty-five.

CUTLER. Ah, you were engaged once.

SECCOMBE. Yes. I found out I'd let myself in for it. She threatened me with a breach of promise, so I paid down my three hundred pounds like a man and got out of it.

CUTLER. [Comes out, draws curtains together, turns down his coat sleeves.] Now, let's get on.

SECCOMBE. I'm ready.

CUTLER. [Walking up and down, dictating.] "To sum up, this twin revolt of labour and woman is then a rebellion of more than one-half of civilised mankind against the fundamental laws and conditions of human existence. What is the remedy?"

SECCOMBE. [Writing.] "Remedy."

CUTLER. "Clearly to change those fundamental laws and conditions. Nature is the author of them. To her then we must address our appeal."

SECCOMBE. "Appeal."

CUTLER. "All Beneficent Goddess, we beseech Thee to change the present order of the universe, which weighs so grievously on the feeble, the diseased, and the worthless. Especially do we entreat Thee to revoke Thy cruel command to them to beget their like, which mocks all our charity, defeats all our legislation, and encumbers us with ever-increasing misery and disorder. Cast a pitying eye on our distressed politicians, who, finding Thy present laws inhuman and unworkable, are laboriously engaged in voting against them, and will in any case continue to

shut their eyes to them. Dear Goddess, ordain some gentler dispensation for the governance of this planet. Hasten a millennium of blessedness and comfort for everybody who can't and won't work himself, and won't let anybody else."

SECCOMBE. If this gets into the labour papers, they'll burn you in effigy.

CUTLER. Many excellent theologians have been burnt in the flesh for airing unintelligible dogmas. I mustn't mind being burnt in effigy for warning my working men friends off a mirage. Proceed.

SECCOMBE. Ready.

CUTLER. [Dictating.] "It cannot be doubted that the Beneficent Goddess will hearken to our petition. She cannot have doomed the vast majority of mankind to constant and irksome toil. She cannot mean what she says. She'll think better of it. And the moment Nature changes her methods, our labour troubles will automatically disappear."

SECCOMBE. [Writing.] "Disappear."

CUTLER. "For the widely spread rebellion amongst women, an equally sure and easy remedy seems to be at hand. The present inferior position of women is directly traceable to the disagreeable necessity which is at present laid upon them of becoming mothers. This necessity once removed, their status will be immediately raised to that of perfect equality with men. Here again we have simply to circumvent, or change a manifestly cruel and unjust decree of Nature."

SECCOMBE. "Nature."

CUTLER. "Happily the recent triumphs of science

warrant us in hoping that a less clumsy and unmentionable means will soon be discovered of perpetuating the human race."

SECCOMBE. "Perpetuating the human race."

CUTLER. "Already we may discern amongst civilized peoples some indications of the development of a neuter sex. If these indications are to be trusted, we are justified in looking forward to a period when the present disabilities and discontent of women will vanish in the establishment of a human sexual economy founded on the model of the beehive."

SECCOMBE. "Model of the beehive."

CUTLER. "The gain to human happiness, human sanity, human progress, the relief to our nerves, which will follow this desirable innovation cannot be estimated. For the first time in its history the human race will be able to devote itself to serious affairs. Once eliminate this wasteful pastime, this cheating folly that we call love from our daily lives, and we—

[Enter SANDFORD.]

SANDFORD. [Announces.] Madame Lora Delmar.

[Enter LORA DELMAR.]

[Exit SANDFORD.]

[LORA DELMAR is a rather tall, dark woman, about thirty-five, with striking rather than beautiful features. She has large sad eyes, a full sinuous mouth, and a fine calm brow. Her face gives the impression that she has lived, and loved, and suffered. Her figure

is elegant and supple. She is beautifully but quietly and tastefully dressed.

LORA. Good-morning, dear sage. [Shaking hands.] You're busy?

CUTLER. Never, when you can talk or sing to me.

LORA. You said I might always come in. Good morning, Mr. Seccombe.

SECCOMBE. [Has risen.] Good morning, Madame. [Goes to door.] Shall I wait?

CUTLER. No, come in after lunch. [Exit SECCOMBE.]

CUTLER. I'm delighted to see you. I thought you were away in the provinces. [Looks at her.] What has brought you to town?

LORA. Oh, I'm so unhappy, dear sage. My heart is just dead within me. No, it isn't. I wish it was.

CUTLER. Poor child of the storm! What's the matter? George?

LORA. [Just nods.] He's torturing me to death by inches. You don't mind my coming to you?

CUTLER. [Very sympathetically.] No! No! Tell me all about it.

LORA. Thanks. I wouldn't have troubled you, but I've no one else. I've kept it shut up here for weeks. I had to tell some one, or let it drive me mad.

CUTLER. Very well, tell me. So George is behaving badly again?

LORA. Yes; I left London a month ago on my provincial tour. He promised to join me in two or three days. I knew he didn't mean to come, because —I've not been holding him for a long time now. He wrote, putting me off with excuses. I wrote to him

again and again. He didn't answer. I couldn't bear it any longer—I had inquiries made. He'd gone to Paris with—whom do you think? Belle Chillington, the music-hall Paroquet.

CUTLER. Paroquet?

LORA. She dresses in red and yellow feathers like a parrot, and has a vulgar scene with a drunken sailor, all screaming and swearing. And George has gone to her. Can you imagine why I love such a man?

CUTLER. No. Why do you?

LORA. I can't help myself. These last weeks—you don't know what it has been— forcing myself to feel and sing words that meant nothing—smiling and bowing to the audience—then going back to a country hotel—the nights I've spent, pacing up and down the room, with the senseless wall-papers grinning at me—tearing at them to get to him—making up my mind to go to Paris by the first train,—and then to end it with a dose of morphia.

CUTLER. You won't do that?

LORA. The night before last I did buy the stuff. I poured it out, but I happened to catch sight of his photograph. Oh, my God! that a man should have it in his power to rack the woman who loves him as George Norton is racking me!

[She buries her face in her hands and sobs. He stands over her and tenderly pats her shoulder. She continues to sob.]

CUTLER. Cry away! Ease your heart!

[She gradually gets calmer, and at length ceases to sob and dries her eyes.]

LORA. There! I'm better now I've told you!
Thanks! [Warmly grasps his hand.]

CUTLER. That's right! You've conquered yourself.
And now! You'll have lunch with me, and go back
to your tour. Where are you singing to-night?

LORA. Nowhere. I've broken up my tour.

CUTLER. Broken up your tour?

LORA. Yes, and sent my people away. Last night
at Chester all the places were taken—the audience
was seated—I was dressed. I felt I couldn't go on—
I simply couldn't, so it was announced I was ill. I
went back to the hotel, and came up to London this
morning.

CUTLER. [Looks at her and shakes his head at her very
gravely and reproachfully.] What are you going to do?

LORA. Take the first train to George.

CUTLER. No! You mustn't do that!

LORA. Yes, I must.

CUTLER. You say he's in Paris?

LORA. He was there last week. I'm going to find
out if he's there still, or where he is, and go to him.

CUTLER. No, no, no!

LORA. Yes, yes, yes!

CUTLER. Haven't you had misery enough with him?

LORA. Misery? [With a little bitter laugh.] If you
knew half!

CUTLER. Well, surely this ought to convince
you—

LORA. Of what?

CUTLER. George Norton isn't worthy of you. He
never has been worthy of you.

LORA. Don't I know that? Haven't I known it all through?

CUTLER. You surely won't be mad enough to put yourself in his power again? After this?

LORA. Yes, I shall. [*He makes a gesture of helplessness.*] Don't you think I know it's madness? [*He looks at her pityingly.*] Yes, go on pitying me! I pity myself! I hate myself! I despise myself! I say to myself a hundred times a day that it can only bring me more misery. But I'm going to do it, because—because I'm a woman!

CUTLER. No. Because you're a certain type of woman, and because you're cursed—or rather, blessed—with a certain type of nervous system.

LORA. Cursed!

CUTLER. Cursed and blessed. Cursed for yourself, blessed for the public.

LORA. The public! I hate them. I laugh at them! These last weeks I've been singing wretchedly, carelessly, without any spark of real feeling. But they applaud me just the same. They praise me just the same. They don't know! They're geese! They're sheep! They're fools!

CUTLER. They're very good-natured fools about art and music. They mean well. And their instinct is generally right in the long run. It's right in your case. And they adore you, they worship you. They wait for hours in the cold and rain. They fight for places to hear you. They shout themselves hoarse, and drag your carriage through the streets! Surely you have a duty to them.

LORA. Duty?

CUTLER. Isn't it your first and highest duty in life to give them your very best, all that you have to give! You've no right to waste this divine gift of yours on such a man as George Norton.

LORA. I have a right to do what I like with my life. I have a right to give it to the man I love. And it isn't wasting my gift to love him. You know how splendidly I sang when I first knew him, how I burst on them night after night! It all came from him. It was my love for George I was singing. Whenever I've sung my best, it has been when I have loved him most, and felt surest of him.

CUTLER. But that's past. That's gone.

LORA. No! No! Don't say that.

CUTLER. But isn't it true? To-day George Norton is merely cutting your throat, rifling your voice, wrecking your career. And you know it. Don't you?

LORA. I don't care. I must go to him. Don't you think I've struggled to tear him out of my heart? I can't! He has twisted himself all round it. He has burnt into me, eaten into me! He is me! And when I think he's over there with that—I— [Makes an angry despairing movement.] I can't eat! I can't sleep! My life is dried up. I must go to him.

CUTLER. [Looks at her for some moments.] I give it up.

LORA. What?

CUTLER. Trying to understand. Here are you, squandering all the treasures of your rich full nature

on what? George is good-looking, well-bred, witty, distinguished—I'm fond of him myself—

LORA. Well, then, can't you forgive me for loving him?

CUTLER. But now you know what he is—faithless, worthless—

LORA. I know he's worthless. I know he deceives me. What does that matter? A mother knows her son to be worthless. But she doesn't cease to love him.

CUTLER. You would have made a good mother.

LORA. Shouldn't I? I often think that's worth all the rest. But I've thrown away the best things in life, and now—I've only George. Don't try to part us. I can't give him up. Ah, dear sage, don't try to be wise for me. Let me be foolish for myself, please.

CUTLER. [After a long pause.] Then you've quite made up your mind to let George Norton ruin your life?

LORA. No. When I've won him back, I'm going to devote myself entirely to him.

CUTLER. What about your singing?

LORA. I'm not going to sing any more.

CUTLER. Not going to sing any more? You surely can't mean that?

LORA. Indeed, I do. Oh, how tired I am of it all! It's all acting; my own name doesn't seem real to me. Oh, how I hate it.

CUTLER. You say that now. You won't say it in six months' time.

LORA. Yes, I shall. My singing days are over.

CUTLER. No! No! This is only a passing mood. You'll come out of it, and be your old, eager self, panting for fresh triumphs and fresh fame.

LORA. Fame? What's a singer's fame?

CUTLER. What's anybody's fame? Even Shakespeare's, if one thinks of it? A century or two of growing renown; a babble of confused criticism; a buzz of ignorant worship and applause; a tramp of Americans to his birthplace; a hash of his scenes, and a murder of his musical iambics by unversed actors; then, ten or fifteen thousand years of fading mention; a withering memory; a mere name; an echo fainter, and yet fainter; last of all, millions and millions of years of oblivion. Very empty, all of it! For all that, our pulses will jump when we hear those roars of applause you'll get at Covent Garden next season.

LORA. [Shakes her head sadly.] I sha'n't get them. I don't want them.

CUTLER. What are you going to do?

LORA. I'm going to win him back.

CUTLER. Suppose you don't succeed?

LORA. I must! I shall! I've won him back before. I shall do it again.

CUTLER. And then—if he deceives you again?

LORA. I shall keep him this time. I'm going to try a different plan. I've been very selfish. I've given so much of my time and myself to my singing. I haven't always put him first. Now I shall be free to give him everything. I shall find out some dear little place in the country—

CUTLER. A rose-bowered cottage on a village green?
Will that suit George for long?

LORA. Oh, I can take him to London, or Paris, or the South. I can always keep him when we're alone. And he's fond of country life.

CUTLER. Won't you soon tire of it yourself, and long for your work and your triumphs?

LORA. I'm sick of my triumphs! I loathe my work! Oh, I shall be so glad to be rid of it all, and live a real life at last. How I envy some women!

CUTLER. Such as —?

LORA. Well, that silly little chattering friend of yours who dined here that night:

CUTLER. Evie Janway?

LORA. Yes. She lives in a dear old English town; she has a good, kind husband, plenty of money and friends—no heartaches, no sleeplessness, no miserable jealousies. She has never had to fight for her daily bread as I have done—she hasn't to fight to keep the man she loves. Why should she have everything to make a woman happy, while I am tortured and torn to pieces as I am?

CUTLER. Ah, that rosebowered cottage, on a village green, where happy peasants dance, and perpetual summer reigns! Why don't we all live in it? Even I never get any nearer to it than Highgate. Yet if ever a man deserved unalloyed happiness, I do.

LORA. [Looks at him a little searchingly.] You've had your sorrows?

CUTLER. [After a glance into his past.] I have lived.

But I've had no fever of life for twenty-five years.
I found a panacea.

LORA. A panacea?

CUTLER. When I was thirty-five, I looked round and asked what was the best thing I could wish for myself in life.

LORA. And what was that?

CUTLER. To possess my own soul. I had a good constitution; no overmastering passions, and a very comfortable fortune. I permitted myself no vice, and every luxury: the luxury of leisure; the luxury of a serene mind; the luxury of clear thinking; the luxury of the apt word; the luxury of the chiselled phrase; a little love, much friendship; a little science, much literature; a little art, much music; the best editions; fine glass, fine china, fine silver, fine linen, rare vintages.

LORA. But we can't all have these luxuries.

CUTLER. Scarcely one of them will be attainable in a pure democracy. So I remain an aristocrat—the last of the Tories, the last of the aristocrats. There's only one luxury I haven't been able to allow myself—the luxury of living in the eighteenth century. Still here I am, passably content.

LORA. [Looks at him for some moments.] I don't know that I envy you. No. One hour of love is worth it all. I think I pity you. What you have lost!

CUTLER. What I have gained! My panacea is of no use to you?

LORA. Not the least.

CUTLER. I knew it wouldn't be.

LORA. [After a moment.] I want you to come to Paris with me.

CUTLER. What for?

LORA. To help me win him back.

CUTLER. Surely you are the only one who can do that.

LORA. You can make it easier for me. He'll listen to you.

CUTLER. I've met a dozen men who would listen to advice on matters of love. I've never met one who would take it. And certainly George Norton won't.

LORA. Yes—he likes you, he admires you. And his father made him promise he'd always look upon you as his best friend.

CUTLER. And so George does. And I promised his father I'd always keep an eye on George. And so I do. But there it ends. I have no influence upon him.

LORA. Yes, you have, more than you think. Ah, dear sage, do help me! You don't know how miserable I am!

CUTLER. You're determined to go to him?

LORA. Yes; I'm going from here to the inquiry office to get his address.

CUTLER. Well, you needn't go to Paris for him. George is dining with me here to-night.

[*Her face changes and lights up with joy and hope; her movements and words are bright, quick, excited, eager.*]

LORA. Dining with you to-night? Has he left her?

CUTLER. I don't know.

LORA. I'll dine with you, too. Don't say you won't have me. You will, won't you? What time?

CUTLER. Eight o'clock.

LORA. I'll be here. Then he's in London? What's his address?

CUTLER. He wrote from the Club, saying he wanted to see me, and inviting himself to dinner.

LORA. I might see him this afternoon—no, perhaps that wouldn't be the wisest thing to do.

CUTLER. The wisest thing would be—to leave him alone.

LORA. Ah, don't talk, don't talk!

CUTLER. The next least foolish, to let me have him here to dinner alone.

LORA. No, I'm coming.

CUTLER. Very well. It might be awkward for us to sit down to dinner, if he didn't expect you. George needs careful handling sometimes.

LORA. Don't I know it?

CUTLER. I'll send him a wire to get here about seven, and I'll see him first.

LORA. Oh, that's kind of you. You'll do all you can for me?

CUTLER. [With a sigh.] Yes, I'll try to arrange a new lease of unhappiness for you.

LORA. No! No! Well, if I am unhappy—so be it. But this time I shall keep him. Tell him—you know what to tell him.

CUTLER. I'll pack as much persuasion as I can into half an hour. Then you come in about half-past

seven, and I'll leave you with him while I go to dress.

LORA. Thanks! Thanks!

CUTLER. Now, what shall we give George for dinner?

LORA. Oh, I'll leave it all to you.

CUTLER. Well, I may not be able to mend your broken heart, but I can give you a good dinner.

LORA. You're a friend indeed. I must run away. I've got to see about some things at the dressmakers. I must look my best to-night. *Au 'voir.* Thanks! Thanks! [Going towards door, offering her hand.]

CUTLER. [Taking her hand, holds it, looks at her.] I'm doing you a great wrong—

LORA. No! No!

CUTLER. Yes, I'm doing you and English music the greatest wrong I can do you.

LORA. No! No!

CUTLER. [Releasing her hand.] But we shall soon hear you sing again?

LORA. I don't know? Perhaps. Yes, give him back to me, and I can't help singing. Half-past seven, then?

CUTLER. Half-past seven. [He follows her off, and a moment later is heard to say, The door, Sandford. In another moment he returns, stands gravely thoughtful in the middle of the room, with his hands in his pockets; takes out a letter from his jacket, reads. "As you may guess, it will be no easy or pleasant task to get clear of her. I am anxious to let her down as gently as possible. So I've run over from Paris to

get you to lend me a hand. I want you to break it to her that this time it is final."

[Shakes his head, sighs deeply, with a little shrug, raises his hands from his side, drops them helplessly.]

CURTAIN.

ACT II

SCENE. *The same.* TIME: *Before dinner on the same day. The room is well lighted; the fire is burning brightly; the curtains are drawn over the windows, and all is cheerful and cosy.*

WILL JANWAY enters, followed by CUTLER. They are in morning dress. Will is a pleasant-looking, round-faced, well-built, ordinary young Englishman, rather over thirty.

WILL. [Very excited and indignant.] And I'm hanged if I can stand it any longer!

CUTLER. But, Will, you oughtn't to bring people home to dinner without letting her know.

WILL. Without letting her know?

CUTLER. You brought these Pumphreys to dinner when she was entertaining her musical friends.

WILL. What! I told her in the morning that I'd asked the Pumphreys to a chop and a bird. She said: "We can't have the Pumphreys because I'm going to invite Karlinski and Schneberger." I said, "We must have the Pumphreys, because I've got a big business deal on with Pumphrey." "You can't bring the Pumphreys here to-night." "I shall bring the Pumphreys here to-night." "You

will not bring the Pumphreys here to-night." "I shall bring the Pumphreys here to-night." And so on for an hour.

CUTLER. Time wasn't very valuable with you that morning?

WILL. Oh yes, it was, by Jove! I had an important appointment at half-past nine. And she kept me there rowing till half-past ten. You know how women will hang on to any silly idea that gets into their heads.

CUTLER. They are tenacious of—what gets into their heads. How did you get out of the deadlock?

WILL. We didn't get out of it. I said at last [*tapping the table with his finger to emphasize each word*] "I shall bring the Pumphreys here at a quarter past seven." I said: "No dress or nonsense—just a good, plain, old-fashioned, English family dinner."

CUTLER. These Pumphreys—they're not quite Evie's sort?

WILL. No, thank God. They don't belong to her crew. Mrs. Pumphrey is the dearest, kindest, motherly old soul. And Pumphrey is a thorough downright John Bull Englishman—as decent an old boy as ever breathed—puts me on to no end of good things in business.

CUTLER. The dinner was not quite a success, Evie tells me.

WILL. No, by Jove! When we got there we found Evie with a jowly Russian fiddler on one side of her, and a plastered-up, yellow-haired old squawker on the

other. They were half through some greasy French mess that looked like vaseline, with lumps of black leather in it. Evie had brought in a job cook from the French restaurant. She calls that giving a dinner-party.

CUTLER. The French cuisine has its caprices.

WILL. The Pumphreys and I sat down at our end of the table, and I ordered some cold meat pie.

CUTLER. And then the conversation became general?

WILL. I did my best to make myself agreeable to the jowly fiddler, while she glared at the Pumphreys, and made fun of them in French to the yellow old squawker. So I explained to the Pumphreys what Evie was saying about them. That sent her off in a furious huff to her concert, and Pumphrey and I had a comfortable evening over a bottle of port.

CUTLER. And after the concert? More harmony?

WILL. The moment Evie came in I saw she wanted to have a row.

CUTLER. You indulged her?

WILL. I did! After a quiet little skirmish, she went at me hammer and tongs, ragged all my friends and relations, snorted about the room, flung her arms about, knocked a glass of whisky over her new evening dress, and screamed herself off into hysterics. I slipped quietly off to bed.

CUTLER. The night brought wisdom?

WILL. Yes, we got up and talked it over quietly, and made up our minds to part.

CUTLER. Divorce?

WILL. Divorce, as soon as we can put it through.

CUTLER. Won't you find that rather an [*sniffs*] unsavoury job ?

WILL. Oh, it's a dirty nuisance. But, of course, you've got to keep the woman out of it. So what am I to do ?

CUTLER. Can't you give Evie a little flat in town, let her have her own friends, come up occasionally to see her, and so rub along for a year or two ?

WILL. No, I'm not going to be a married bachelor. You know what that means. No ! I've had five years of it ; and now I'm going to clear out for good, and make a fresh start.

CUTLER. You'll marry again ?

WILL. Not I, by Jove. It's too much of a risk.

CUTLER. What then ? You're a healthy, vigorous man of —— How old are you ?

WILL. Thirty-two.

CUTLER. You don't propose to live a life of total abstinence ?

WILL. Well, not exactly total ——

CUTLER. What quantity, and quality, and variety of feminine companionship do you propose to allow yourself ? Don't tell me. I don't wish to know. But ask yourself.

WILL. I mean to go as straight as I can.

CUTLER. How straight will that be ?

WILL. Well, as straight as a decent, healthy, not bad-looking chap can be expected to go. I don't pretend to be a saint.

CUTLER. No. And saints often allow themselves

considerable latitude in this matter, so as to qualify themselves for admonishing sinners more severely. Putting saints aside, as untrustworthy guides for conduct, how straight do you mean to go? Don't tell me. You know your own past history.

WILL. *[After a little reflection, bursts out.]* It's nothing but one eternal, confounded, silly mess-up from the time you're eighteen! If you go fooling about generally, you very likely get yourself disabled for life; and suppose you don't, it knocks you to bits, and you're ashamed to look a decent woman in the face. If you take on some chorus girl, she sells you all round, draws all your cash, and then throws you over. If you pick up some little milliner or office girl, you get her into trouble, and she hangs round you so that you can't shake her off. And if you make up your mind to cut it altogether, you don't have a moment's peace till you cave in; and then you feel you've made a thundering ass of yourself both ways. So what are you to do?

CUTLER. The best solution seems to be a strictly temperate life in youth, with constant hard occupation till you're married.

WILL. Married? And then you get landed that way! And nine times, out of ten you turn out all the worse husband for not having had your fling before. How many husbands are there that go perfectly straight?

CUTLER. There are no statistics.

WILL. And how many of them have had their fling before?

CUTLER. The Government is too busy to order a Parliamentary return.

WILL. It's a beastly puzzling riddle.

CUTLER. It is a riddle. But every man has got to find an answer.

WILL. I give it up.

CUTLER. Then you drift about all your life in helpless confusion. Every man has got to rule and placate his woman through ruling himself—or perish. Every nation has got to rule and placate its women through ruling itself—or perish.

WILL. Well, I've tried it all round, and I've come to the conclusion, " You can neither live with them, nor without them."

CUTLER. That is the exact dilemma. Upon which horn of it do you propose to impale yourself?

WILL. Which horn did you impale yourself on when you were young?

CUTLER. The wrong one—necessarily. Like the saints, I have qualified myself by sinning to be an example to evil-doers.

WILL. You never got married?

CUTLER. No. I looked round the human Zoo, but I couldn't see any animal that I desired for a lifelong mate. The gazelle had beauty and grace, but little sense. The tigress had beauty and allurement, but she would have devoured me. The parrots were smartly dressed, but they chattered too much. The camel would have borne my burdens, but she had a detestable profile. The monkeys had many of my tastes and habits, but their talk was scarcely above the level of a

modern society comedy. I watched a little squirrel—it was dainty and cheerful and tame, but it fidgeted incessantly. Not one of them had any taste for literature. I hesitated before a lovely bird of paradise, and flirted with her till I found she was utterly stupid. A beautiful soft-eyed Scotch collie came up to me and nosed my hand, but she was sorrowing for her dead master, and had no love to give me. Then I inquired my way to the Phœnix cage; but when I got there I found it empty. So I never married.

WILL. Then what did you do?

CUTLER. I had weeks and months of hard study, self-discipline and self-denial, with occasional filthy revels amongst the fleshpots. But I never lost hold of myself, and I never fell under the dominion of any woman for longer than half an hour.

WILL. What luck!

CUTLER. No, merely normal masculine competency. That went on till I was well past thirty. My early manhood was passing; the fleshpots were growing more pleasant, and my descents amongst them more frequent. One morning I woke and looked in the glass; my face was a little bloated; my eyes were reddish, and watery, and shifty; my tongue was furred, and my hand shook. I couldn't read "Paradise Lost" with any pleasure. I had what religious people call a sudden conversion. I saved my soul on the spot.

WILL. You don't mean you pulled up altogether?

CUTLER. From that moment. Sophocles didn't escape from the savage master till he was seventy. I shook him off at thirty-five.

WILL. Didn't you find it a pretty hard job ?

CUTLER. Not in the least. Virtue is a mere habit. We never know how easy it is till we practise it.

WILL. And women haven't bothered you since ?

CUTLER. Very rarely and distantly. When once I found myself secure on the bank, I stayed there. And now sometimes I look down into the slimy whirlpool, and see the blind eels twisting and wriggling and curling round each other, feeding on the rank weeds—I turn away and look heavenwards.

WILL. Yes. I'll look heavenwards when I'm sixty.

CUTLER. And meantime ?

WILL. Oh, I intend to go as straight as I can—I suppose I shall go and make a damned fool of myself.

CUTLER. Is that inevitable ?

WILL. Well, what am I to do ?

CUTLER. [Looks at him.] It's strange.

WILL. What is ?

CUTLER. So many of us wouldn't live for a day in a dirty disordered room ; yet we live all our lives in dirty disordered minds.

WILL. [With strong conviction.] You know I should have made a jolly good husband, if I'd only married the right sort of wife.

CUTLER. Such as— ? Amongst your own acquaintance whom would you choose ?

WILL. Well, the right sort. A woman who'd fall in with my ways, and try to understand me. Evie has never understood me.

CUTLER. Have you ever understood her ?

WILL. No, I'm hanged if I have!

CUTLER. It is questionable whether skill in character reading tends to promote married happiness. Rather the reverse, I should say. Now this unknown fair, with whom and for whom you propose to make a damned fool of yourself?

WILL. I don't *propose* to make a damned fool of myself.

CUTLER. No, but you will. Do you think you are likely to be any happier with her than you are with Evie? Won't you be robbed, tricked, deceived, perhaps dragged into some disgraceful scandal? You have your own set of friends. You can't introduce her to them. Your whole business and social life will be disarranged and confused. Aren't you almost sure to be less happy than you are now? Hadn't you better humour your present situation with Evie?

WILL. No, I've humoured the situation, and I've humoured Evie, and they both get worse. No! Evie and I have got to part. We don't agree about anything else, but we do agree about that. And I want to talk with you about the settlements—

[*Enter SANDFORD.*

SANDFORD. Mr. Norton is here, sir.

CUTLER. Just a minute, Sandford.

[*Exit SANDFORD.*

CUTLER. George has come to dinner, and he wants a little talk first. The settlements will take some time—won't they?

WILL. No. Why should they? If Evie takes out

of the concern what she brought into it that ought to satisfy her?

CUTLER. I don't suppose it will.

WILL. If it does, it will be the only thing in life that ever did.

CUTLER. You wish to treat her generously, I'm sure.

WILL. I expect I shall have to. [Groans.] It cost me a heap of money to marry her; it has cost me a heap to keep her; and now it's going to cost me a heap to get rid of her.

CUTLER. Life is full of costly experiments. Where are you staying?

WILL. At the Lancaster.

CUTLER. Evie is with you?

WILL. Oh yes. We're dining together and going to the theatre. We're on better terms than we've been for months past.

CUTLER. I'll come to you at ten to-morrow. We'll see what Evie wants, and then go to Harland's office, and get him to make out a draft agreement.

WILL. Right. Then we can get to business.

[CUTLER goes to the door and opens it.

CUTLER. [Speaking off.] Ah, George, come in!

[GEORGE NORTON enters in evening dress. He is a dark, handsome, distinguished, well-bred man about thirty-five, with quiet, easy, careless manners.

NORTON. How are you? [Shaking hands with CUTLER.] How d'ye do, Janway? [Nodding to WILL.]

WILL. How d'ye do?

NORTON. Mrs. Janway quite well?

WILL. First-rate, thanks.

NORTON. Remember me to her, will you?

WILL. I will. [To CUTLER.] Ten o'clock to-morrow, then.

CUTLER. I'll be there. [Opens door, calls off.] The door, Sandford.

WILL. Good evening, Norton.

NORTON. Good evening.

WILL. [To CUTLER.] Good-bye.

CUTLER. [Shaking hands.] Good-bye.

[Exit WILL. CUTLER closes the door after him.

NORTON. I'm here to time. You got my letter about Lora?

CUTLER. Yes, I'm sorry, deeply sorry.

NORTON. Yes, it's a pity, poor girl. But that's how it is. Natural course of events in all these affairs. Hot love, passionate devotion, eternal fidelity; gradual cooling off on the part of one or both; bother to keep it up; infernal boredom; tugging at the chains; and then common sense comes in and says, "What's the use? You know you're damned sick of it all. Why not own up and get out of it?"

CUTLER. So you're going to get out of it?

Norton. I am.

CUTLER. Do you realise what you are throwing up? The entire love and devotion of a beautiful, accomplished woman—a woman without the freaks and pettiness and childish vanities of her sex—a large generous creature—a woman who has London at her feet, and could choose her lovers by the dozen—a great

artist, with her divine gift—something altogether beyond and away from the ordinary woman—

NORTON. Oh, come down to bedrock, and a woman's a woman.

CUTLER. Ah, then you don't realize.

NORTON. Yes, I do. Lora is a prize for any man; and I've been very lucky to find a woman who has helped me to spend four years very pleasantly. But the four years have gone; and now I have the wretched bad taste not to wish for another four years, or four weeks, or four days.

CUTLER. You're right. You have wretched bad taste.

NORTON. I know it! I know it!

CUTLER. And you're making a great mistake.

NORTON. I feel sure I am. Who doesn't with women?

CUTLER. She has given you the four best years of her life. You have taken from her the power to love another man deeply. Aren't you bound to stand by her, and give her some show of constancy and affection? Don't you owe her that at least?

NORTON, I do! And a good deal more! And I can't pay! That's the deuce of it. That's why I've come to you to help me wind up the affair.

CUTLER. Hadn't you better see her yourself?

NORTON. What's the use?

CUTLER. You must come to some understanding, and perhaps—who knows? When you see her and talk to her—"On revient toujours à ses anciennes amours."

NORTON. No, not toujours. Sometimes—after a

long ramble away from them. But in this instance—
[shaking his head]—the proverb won't fit.

CUTLER. At any rate, see her. You can't sneak away from her, without offering her some explanation of your conduct.

NORTON. Oh, as to my conduct, it's damned bad, and there's no explanation of it. But I don't want to sneak away. I'm thinking how I can let her down gently. If I were to see her, I should only have a bad half-hour; she'd have a worse. I should merely feel uncomfortable, and own I'm a skunk. But she'd fret her heart to pieces, open up all the old wounds, and—poor girl!

CUTLER. Still, you'd better meet her.

NORTON. No, I want to spare her. I have prepared her a little. I dare say she guesses, and if you were to see her and soften it as far as you can—— Black-guard me as much as you like; I deserve it.

CUTLER. You do.

NORTON. She'll be far better off without me——

CUTLER. She will, undoubtedly.

NORTON. Well, that's the line to take. You know how to put it. Get her to see it in that light.

CUTLER. If she only could!

NORTON. Well, then, you'll see her?

CUTLER. No; I'll arrange for her to meet you——

NORTON. Good Lord, no! What can be the use, except to give her pain?

[CUTLER *shakes his head, makes a grimace of vexation, walks about the room, takes out*

his watch, looks at it, puts it back, looks at Norton, who is smoking a cigarette.

CUTLER. There's another woman?

NORTON. Well, naturally.

CUTLER. What sort of a woman? Don't tell me. I've no wish to dip my fingers in that bowl. But ask yourself. You're giving up Lora Delmar—for what? What's the bargain you've got in exchange?

NORTON. I haven't totted it up. I sha'n't call for the bill till I've finished the dinner. Then I dare say I shall find I've been swindled.

CUTLER. Not a very recherché meal you're sitting down to, eh?

NORTON. One gets tired of the best cooking. I fed at Garnier's once for a month on end. It drove me to a little rowdy Palais Royal restaurant.

CUTLER. With réchauffé dishes and a dirty table-cloth? You liked that?

NORTON. It was a change.

CUTLER. Change? The food was exactly the same, only coarser, staler, greasier, dirtier. Change? Lust is always the same. Intrigue is always the same. It's only a deep enduring love that is always fresh, always varied, always new.

NORTON. Don't fancy I'm cut out for it.

CUTLER. What are you cut out for? This new treasure trove——?

NORTON. What about her?

CUTLER. Some jewel of God's fine workmanship? Something very rare, beautiful, accomplished, refined, sympathetic, eh?

NORTON. I can't say she is.

CUTLER. Take care, George. A man stamps his own character by the character of the woman he constantly pairs with.

NORTON. Mine's pretty battered. I don't think it can come to much further harm. But if it does, that's my look out.

CUTLER. What is your look out? When you tire of this *compagne de voyage*, who's to be the next? And the next? And the next? What are your plans for middle age?

NORTON. I haven't got any.

CUTLER. What's your old age going to be?

NORTON. Heaven knows. Rather doddering, I should say. You're asking me a lot of awkward questions.

CUTLER. [Very kindly.] Won't you ask them yourself? Won't you look ahead?

NORTON. I'd rather not, if you don't mind. I dare say things will straighten out all right.

CUTLER. Won't you straighten them out yourself? First of all, there's your wife—

NORTON. Oh, that has straightened out of itself. Of all my *compagnes de voyage* my wife has given me the least trouble—since we separated. You know how we came to get married. I never took that seriously.

CUTLER. You did take Lora Delmar seriously?

NORTON. I suppose I did. That's the mistake of taking these affairs seriously. You only jib the more when you find they aren't.

CUTLER. Lora took it very seriously? She's taking it very seriously still?

NORTON. Yes, poor girl. Women do take these things more seriously than men. It's a pity. Makes one feel such a beast when one has got to break it off.

CUTLER. George, think again! She has stuck to you all these years. You know what it means to her. But do you know what it means to yourself? She's the only woman who can bring you home to your best self, and make you of some little use in the world. You won't be so base, so foolish, as to throw her over?

NORTON. Looks very much like it, I'm afraid.

CUTLER. No! No! This other affair is only a passing fancy? It isn't going to last?

NORTON. I'm leaving for Italy and Egypt in the morning, so I suppose it will last through the winter.

CUTLER. Some months, then?

NORTON. For all I know it may last for some years. I'm sure I hope it may. It will save me a lot of trouble if it does.

CUTLER. And when it's over? Don't you think you'll find out the worth of Lora Delmar and come back to her?

NORTON. I might. Really, I can't say. I don't feel like it at present. In any case, I leave Charing Cross at nine to-morrow morning.

CUTLER. Cancel it. George. You aren't so tied up that you couldn't get out of it?

NORTON. The tickets are taken. I'm booked till March. The only thing is to wish me *Bon voyage*—unless you've got any more awkward questions?

CUTLER. Yes, just one. What attraction can a man with your bringing up, tastes, education, associations—the best that England could give a man—what attraction can you find in daily intimacy with such a woman? Don't you feel degraded, imbruted by it?

NORTON. I say, my dear old friend, with all your experience of men and women, you aren't going to take off your coat, and try to mop up the sexual mess, are you?

CUTLER. No. [*He looks at Norton for a long time and then goes up to him and speaks very kindly and gravely.*] George, you're making a fearful havoc of your life.

NORTON. Ain't I?

CUTLER. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?

NORTON. If I'm not, I ought to be.

CUTLER. When you left Oxford and went into Parliament, we all had the highest hopes of you. You dropped into your uncle's seat; you had all the best training and traditions; you made your mark at once; if you'd kept at it, you'd have been one of the leaders of the party to-day.

NORTON. Getting myself horsewhipped by suffragettes; spouting party twaddle all over the country; and marching in and out of the lobbies half the night.

CUTLER. But you were born into the governing classes. That was your heritage—to govern. That was your post. You ran away from it. You're a deserter.

NORTON. I stuck to it for seven years, during which my enlightened constituents entirely disfranchised themselves by giving me Bill Bowler, the labour king, for a colleague. Just before the nineteen-six election, as I was leaving the House, I came across Bill in the middle of a group of labour royalties. He casually referred to me as a blanky aristocratic loafer.

CUTLER. Wasn't he about right?

NORTON. Perfectly. An admirable description of me. I couldn't have bettered it myself. Except that I was not blanky—not in any literal sense. When the election came, I saw the country was in for a blanky period of blanky legislation by blanky persons and blanky methods. So I scuttled, and left the science of government to Bill Bowler.

CUTLER. You scuttled?

NORTON. I did. And seeing the blanky muddle the blanky country has got itself into, don't you think I was very well out of it?

CUTLER. No. It isn't the time for scuttling. The Goths are upon us. They're going to sweep away aristocratic loafers. Have no doubt about that. They'll sweep you away. And they'll be right. But the mischief is, they won't care what else they sweep away. In the scrimmage, they may sweep away what's left of art and literature and architecture

in our common national life ; everything that has any enduring value or beauty ; everything that we mean when we say "England" ; everything that has made our country something different from a shrieking railway yard, surrounded by factories, and miles of squalid brick hutches for human rabbits ; everything that made this land a soil to grow great men, great poets, great warriors, great seamen, great statesmen ; great thinkers. What do they care what they sweep away ? But they're going to sweep you away, George —that's certain. The danger is they may sweep me away too.

NORTON. I should be sorry for that. But with all respect for you, aren't you something of an elegant superfluity ?

CUTLER. No. I am the most necessary member of the social organism. I am a man of leisure.

NORTON. Well, that's very pleasant for you. But I don't see your particular use.

CUTLER. I have tried to think for mankind. To do that, I must have ample leisure, freedom from personal cares, and easy circumstances. Then I can fulfil my function.

NORTON. Well, old friend, they don't seem to have very much need of you.

CUTLER. You think not ? Look at the mad hungry mobs of the earth, clamouring for perpetual beer and skittles. Look at the noisy gangs of politicians, voting the mobs their beer and skittles, or anything else they shout loud enough for. Darwin has lived in vain for politicians. They have never even heard of

him. How can these brass heads think for the people? How can the people think for themselves, among all the damnable clatter of their party machines? Don't they need somebody to think for them? Yes, they need me. But they don't want me. Very well. I'll step aside, and make way for my colleague.

NORTON. Who's that?

CUTLER. The man with a sword.

NORTON. Yes, I suppose Kitchener will have to look in before it's over.

CUTLER. Meantime, you're going to loaf in Egypt?

NORTON. Oh, I shall push into the interior and get some sport—.

CUTLER. Sport? Won't you pull yourself together, George? Isn't it worth making an effort? If you must have a woman's companionship, what in the wide world could you wish for more than you've already got, and are throwing away? Won't you pick up your career with her, go into Parliament again; or, if the time for talking is nearly over, get ready for action. There will be plenty to do in England before long. Your grandfather lies at Lucknow—is the old spirit all gone?

NORTON. I say, you're making me feel plaguy uncomfortable. I know I'm in a bad way, and I know the country is in a bad way, but—can't you cut the preaching?

CUTLER. I've finished.

NORTON. That's right. What about dinner? You

wired me to get here at seven, and so I did; but it isn't going to be all sermon pie, is it?

CUTLER. No. I've got a little dinner that you'll like.

NORTON. Good. What time?

CUTLER. Eight or thereabouts. I'm expecting another guest. [Looking at watch.]

NORTON. Who's that?

CUTLER. She'll be here in a few minutes.

NORTON. She? [Looks at him.] Not Lora? [CUTLER doesn't reply.] I say, this is too bad! You oughtn't to have cornered me like this. I'll be off before she comes.

CUTLER. No, George. She's coming on purpose to meet you.

NORTON. It's too bad. And it's so rough on her. No! I'll get away. You'll smooth it down for her, won't you?

CUTLER. [Stopping him.] No. [Listens.] There's a motor just driven up. She's here. You must see her.

[NORTON makes a gesture of intense annoyance.

NORTON. But what's the use? I shall pretend to make it up with her, let her think it's all right, and then write her to-morrow.

CUTLER. No. You mustn't do that.

NORTON. We shall have a beastly uncomfortable evening if I don't. Yes, that's what I shall do.

CUTLER. No, George. That will be cruel, cowardly.

NORTON. Have you seen her?

CUTLER. Yes, this morning.

NORTON. Is she very much cut up ?

CUTLER. Her heart's breaking. I don't envy the feelings of the man who will have to remember all his life that he has broken a heart like hers.

NORTON. Well, then, why do you let me in for it to-night ?

CUTLER. Why do you let yourself in ? You needn't. Spare yourself ; and spare her. It isn't too late.

NORTON. Infernally awkward it's going to be for all of us.

[Enter SANDFORD.]

SANDFORD. [Announces.] Madame Lora Delmar.

[Enter LORA in a soft, beautiful, quiet-toned evening dress. She is pale, excited, hopeful, anxious.]

LORA. Good evening, dear sage.

CUTLER. Good evening.

LORA. [To NORTON.] And you——

NORTON. [Goes to her, kisses her hand gracefully. His manner towards her is very charming and considerate throughout.] Ah, this is delightful.

LORA. [Looking at him anxiously.] You're pleased to see me ? Of course you'll say you are——

NORTON. And mean it, most devoutly. I'd made up my mind for a dull evening. This old wisdom-box has been grinding out good advice to me for the last half-hour, haven't you ?

CUTLER. I do preach, terribly. Coleridge left a few shreds of his mantle hereabouts, and they've clung to my shoulders. [Taking out watch.] I'll go

and dress. [To LORA.] Oh, by the way, a young Cornish composer, by the name of Treganza, has been bothering me for a letter of introduction to you. He's composing an opera on Fair Rosamond.

LORA. Poor creature. There are so many of them.

CUTLER. I gave him the letter. But you needn't see him. You can manage to entertain yourselves till I come down?

NORTON. Pray don't hurry. You couldn't leave me in pleasanter company.

LORA. [To CUTLER.] Now, does he mean that?

CUTLER. [Looks gravely at NORTON.] I think he does. I feel sure he does. [Goes to door, turns, looks at them.] I was going to preach again. I won't. But—[speaks with considerable feeling]—if this short life holds anything at all that is sacred, surely you two are bound to each other. Surely the ties of your attachment should bind you all the closer, because they are silken and not iron. If there is any shadow of an excuse for a love such as yours, it is because it willingly accepts deeper obligations, more lasting responsibilities than marriage itself. The summer is passing for both of you—the heyday is cooling; won't you provide for the coming autumn? Won't you treasure up what little happiness is left for you? Get to understand each other. Find out that you are necessary to each other—and then we'll have dinner.

[Exit.]

LORA. Tell me I've done right in coming.

NORTON. To give me three hours of your company

and spare me three hours of dear old Cutler's philosophy?

LORA. [Very anxiously.] You are really pleased to see me?

NORTON. Ah, you may sometimes doubt *me*, but you should never doubt *yourself*. [Again kisses her hand.] Why do you ask?

LORA. I've been in such a flutter all the afternoon. I thought perhaps you would be annoyed—and think I was forcing myself upon you.

NORTON. What happier destiny could any man have than that you should force yourself upon him? Especially in such a charming dress.

LORA. It's not a new one. You've seen it before. Don't you remember?

NORTON. No, I can't recall it. But since you were doubtless present, you will forgive me if I was so much occupied in admiring you, that I had no attention to give to your dress.

LORA. And to-night you have so little attention to give to me that you can admire my dress.

NORTON. Ah, no. To-night I have so much admiration for you, that it flows over upon everything that is lucky enough to be near you, or upon you.

LORA. Don't you think you are very unkind to make me pretty speeches just now?

NORTON. Aren't you a little unreasonable to present me with such a tempting subject for pretty speeches and then blame me for making them?

LORA. Don't, George; please don't. You must know

that you can't deceive me by all this. [*Looks at him very reproachfully.*] You're very cruel to me.

NORTON. My dear Lora, I am ashamed to own that I could be guilty of deceiving you ; but I could never be guilty of being cruel to you. [*Looking at the dress.*] Anyhow, you can't deny that the dress is exquisitely made, and even more exquisitely worn.

LORA. I put it on because I thought it might remind you of the last time you saw it.

NORTON. When was that ?

LORA. Think.

NORTON. Tenby ? [*She shakes her head.*] Lyndhurst ? [*Shakes her head.*] Cheltenham ? [*She shakes her head, and buries her face in her hands.*]

LORA. How can you bear to speak of them so lightly ?

NORTON. Because I have the pleasantest recollections of them all. To look back on them makes England seem like a delightful stretch of meadow and woodland, dotted all over with lovers' trysting-places.

LORA. Some day I shall go back to them all, and put up a gravestone to the happy hours that have gone.

NORTON. I hope not. When you visit any of them again, I hope it will be to spend still happier hours, with a more deserving companion.

LORA. [*With a flash of indignation.*] You can say that ? You can think it ? I'd rather you had struck me. You have struck me. Please take it back.

NORTON. I beg your pardon. But you must own I haven't always been a very desirable companion.

At Cheltenham, for instance, I scarcely spoke to you at dinner.

LORA. It was my fault. I lost my temper. I'm so sorry, George. Forgive me.

NORTON. No, forgive me. I was a brute.

LORA. You are never that.

NORTON. I was that evening.

LORA. No, you were hungry and tired, and I had kept you waiting.

NORTON. But when you appeared, you were certainly worth waiting for. And how well you sang that evening.

LORA. That was because we had made it up.

NORTON. And how well you looked.

LORA. Did I? What was I wearing?

NORTON. Not that charming—confection.

[Looking at her dress.]

LORA. No. I got this new for—where?

NORTON. Where?

LORA. Guess.

NORTON. Don't tease my memory any more. Tell me.

LORA. Weymouth.

NORTON. Ah, Weymouth.

LORA. Don't you remember? We went out on the water after dinner, and I wore it in the boat with my swansdown over. Don't you remember? The big moon rising over the bay—and the band in the distance playing "Tannhauser" so abominably and so splendidly—and the surly old Dorsetshire boatman—and the oars in the rowlocks—and the dancing lamps on the ripples showing us our way home—and how I

slipped on the wet steps—and how you caught me tight in your arms, and I lent myself to you—I feel the thrill of it now [*Leaning towards him.*] George, it isn't all over?

NORTON. [*Genuinely touched for a moment.*] I have treated you badly, Lora.

LORA. That doesn't matter. We can make a fresh start. We have all the future, haven't we?

NORTON. What a cur I've been to you!

LORA. Forget it, as I've done. [*Clasping him.*]

NORTON. I wish I could. [*Withdrawing from her embrace.*] But the fact remains, I've been a selfish, careless beast. And the worse fact remains, that I'm afraid I sha'n't be any better in the future. You'd far better see that at once, and send me off as I deserve.

LORA. But I can't! I can't! How can you ask it, after all that we have been to each other? Every drop of blood in me is married to a drop of yours. Think of all the dear moments, all the dear memories! They're part of me, like my arms and my feet. Aren't they part of you?

NORTON. You make me feel like a dirty scoundrel who has cheated at cards, or kicked a woman.

LORA. Well, aren't you that, if you throw me over?

NORTON. Yes, I am. But upon my word, I'm not worth making all this fuss about. Come, Lora, be sensible.

LORA. [*Impatiently.*] Oh, be sensible! Be sensible!

NORTON. I wish there was some way in which I could make the *amende*. If you were in need of money, and I could help you; if you wanted friends or introductions. Isn't there anything I can do?

LORA. Yes, one thing.

NORTON. What's that?

LORA. Don't kick me from you.

NORTON. Well, I won't. But tell me, can't I help in your profession?

LORA. I've given it up.

NORTON. Surely not! Given up your singing? What will you do when—

LORA. When you've kicked me away from you? Die slowly, from my heart outwards.

NORTON. But I can't be saddled with this double crime. You mustn't give up your singing. I've always felt so proud of your voice. And I should like to feel proud of it still.

LORA. Do you mean that?

NORTON. Indeed I do.

LORA. [Becomes more animated.] I'll sing to you now. [Going to door, opening it.] What will you have? Do you remember the little song I sang to the urchins that day at the foot of the Saint Gothard?

NORTON. Ah, the Saint Gothard.

LORA. We got very near heaven that day, George?

NORTON. Six thousand feet towards it.

LORA. I'll sing you that, shall I?

[She goes off quickly at the open door. He moves a step or two reluctantly towards the

door, stops, shows great perplexity. She strikes a few chords on the piano in the next room. He looks at his watch, shows annoyance, vexation, impatience. She strikes a few more chords. He makes a step towards door, drops into a chair with disgust; knocks his fist fiercely on to his knee. She strikes a few more chords. He makes a grimace and shrug of helplessness. His face shows a sudden resolve. He smiles and nods to himself.

[LORA re-enters.]

LORA. Aren't you coming? [NORTON rises quickly, and goes to her with a show of eager affection.] Don't you want to hear me?

NORTON. [Taking her in his arms.] Always! Always!

LORA. [Responding to his embrace.] Ah! Do you mean that? Have I won you back?

NORTON. You have never lost me.

[Embracing her. She draws him to her, kisses him passionately, again and again; then bursts into tears, falls into a chair, sobbing and laughing hysterically. He stands behind her, and makes a shrug of pity and helplessness; then shows vexation as she continues sobbing.

LORA. [Getting calmer.] Don't take any notice of me. I shall be better in a moment. [He moves a step or two behind her, looking at her, showing annoyance

and impatience.] There! [Wiping her eyes and smiling at him through her tears.] It's all over now. [Still sobbing and crying a little.] I couldn't help it. [Jumps up.] Oh, I'm so happy!

NORTON. You see you were right. You know me better than I know myself.

LORA. Of course I do. I knew you'd come home to me. You couldn't do without me for long, could you?

NORTON. I sha'n't try, after this.

LORA. Are you sure? Promise me. No, don't promise, because I know you wouldn't keep it. Would you? Could you?

NORTON. I won't promise this time. I'll surprise you, by behaving as perfectly as the man who has the honour of being loved by you ought to behave. And if I don't quite live up to it, it's only because no man could hope to be perfect enough [*putting his arm fondly round her waist, and speaking with great tenderness*] to deserve such love as yours.

LORA. No; don't make me pretty speeches.

NORTON. [Same soft, tender tone.] What, not when I mean them?

LORA. Do you mean them? Then why are you unkind to me?

NORTON. Only that I may have the pleasure of hearing you say that you forgive me.

LORA. Forgive you? I'm yours to do as you please with. Beat me, bruise me, stab me—only love me, and I'll forgive you. That's all past. Now let's talk

of the future. We're going to be happier than we have ever been. Don't you feel that? I've given up my tour, so I'm quite free. Where shall we spend the winter? You said you'd like Italy and Egypt.

NORTON. Where would you like?

LORA. No, you shall choose everything for me, except the man I love; and I'll choose nothing for you, except the woman you love.

NORTON. [Very tenderly.] I've chosen her myself.

LORA. And you've chosen so wisely! Now! Where shall we go? Shall it be Italy and Egypt?

NORTON. The world's end, in your company.

LORA. I'll hunt up all the routes and trains to-morrow. We'll get away from England as soon as we can, shall we? And when we come back in the spring we'll take the dearest little place in the country—somewhere in Kent, or the Surrey Hills, where we can easily get to town, and people can easily get down to us. And you shall have your horses, and your gun, and your dogs; especially this faithful dog, who'll follow you when you want her company; and fetch and carry; and lie down and watch you when she's told; and sometimes steal up to you, and put her paws on your shoulder, and look at you out of her swimming eyes, and say, "Haven't you got a little love to give me, Master? I've nothing to do all my life long but wait on you, Master."

NORTON. But you mustn't give up your profession.

LORA. Yes. It takes up so much of my time and thought; rehearsing all day and singing till midnight, and having to meet people, and listen to their stupid

flatteries, and go to their silly lunches and receptions, and be stared and smirked at—it's all so idiotic. It bores me till I can't bear myself. That's why I've often been so fretful and tiresome to you. I've never been able to give you my best. But I will. You'll see. It shall be so different in the days to come. I've never really had a home ; I'm going to have one at last. You know I'm really a home bird.

NORTON. But you mustn't stop singing.

LORA. Well, I'll sing to you whenever you want to hear me. And I'll sing to the public—sometimes—perhaps. But not this next season. That shall be entirely yours. And listen, bad boy, you'll never play truant from me again !

NORTON. No. I'll never play truant from you again.

LORA. That's right. Just keep on loving me as much as you can, and I'll keep on loving you—a hundred times more than I can. [Breaking from him.] Oh, I've never been so happy ?

[NORTON looks at his watch.

LORA. You're thinking about dinner. It's sure to be something you'll like. And after dinner I'll sing to you a little, and then—we won't stay very late. I've ordered my motor at a quarter to eleven.

NORTON. Right. I'll get you to put me down at the Club.

LORA. At the Club ?

NORTON. I've an appointment there at a quarter past eleven.

LORA. It won't keep you very long ?

NORTON. I'm afraid it will—an hour at least, perhaps two.

LORA. Can't you put it off? Think—to-night, George—you might put it off for to-night.

NORTON. I can't very well get out of it.

LORA. I'll wait for you.

NORTON. No. I mustn't keep you out there in the cold.

LORA. You've kept me out in the cold for a good many weeks. An hour or two longer won't much matter.

NORTON. No. You'd better drop me and go on—

LORA. You'll come?

NORTON. [After a slight hesitation.] Yes—of course.

LORA. You're sure? [Suddenly.] You don't mean to come!

NORTON. Yes, if I get through in anything like decent time. If I don't, I'll run round in the morning.

[There is an awkward silence for some moments.]

LORA. This appointment? It's some very urgent business?

NORTON. Obviously. Could anything but urgent business keep me from you?

LORA. Who is it you are going to meet?

NORTON. Oh, my dear Lora, you mustn't be inquisitive.

LORA. I'm not inquisitive. I've never been mean, or petty, or prying. Have I?

NORTON. Your behaviour has always been perfect

and charming. [*Gracefully kissing her hand.*] I'm sure it will continue to be so. Now, shall we have a pleasant little dinner, and some music, and then you shall drop me at the Club.

LORA. No. [*She walks desperately about the room for a few seconds; then stops in front of him.*] You're going to meet that woman. [*He doesn't reply.*] You're going to meet that woman. Do you deny it?

NORTON. Impossible for me to deny what a lady so confidently affirms.

LORA. After what you have said to me here a few moments ago, you are going from me to her? You are capable of that?

NORTON. I'm afraid I'm very much like the prophet Habakkuk. I am capable de tout.

LORA. This appointment is with her? Have you any further appointments with her? I'm not inquisitive. But six months ago you planned to spend the winter with me. You have made other plans?

NORTON. I'm sure it couldn't give you any pleasure to discuss them.

LORA. No. But I want to know. All the time I have lived with you, I have never known when to trust you. Now we are parting, for once be honest with me. Tell me the truth.

NORTON. If you wish. I'm leaving Charing Cross at nine to-morrow morning. The tickets are taken, and the servants have gone on with the luggage.

LORA. Where are you going?

NORTON. Italy and Egypt.

LORA. [*Very quietly, very bitterly.*] Italy and Egypt. Thank you. Now I know.

NORTON. That being so, what do you wish me to do? Shall I go to Cutler and make my excuses, and give him an unpleasant evening? Or would you rather I stayed and went through the dinner? I'm afraid it wouldn't be a very agreeable time for any of us. But I am at your service.

LORA. You're at my service?

NORTON. Now, and always.

LORA. You're at my service? No, you're at the service of any thing in skirts that catches your fancy. The dustman who carts the street rubbish from house to house is better employed than you, you scavenger! You're at my service? No, it's I who have been at your service. It's I who have crawled up to you, and begged for leave to wait on you and be your slave. For four years I have given you all, all—yes more—that the purest and truest woman could give to the best and truest man. Oh, my God! Has ever a woman loved a man as I have loved you? Has ever a woman humbled herself as I have humbled myself to you? And for what? How have you paid me? You have always lied to me. Even when you loved me most—and you have loved me, George Norton—if there has ever been any love in that heart of yours that's been worth having, I've had it—you'll never love another woman as you have loved me—but what has your best love been worth? Even in our happiest moments, you have always been ready to trick and deceive me. Don't you think I

know you? Well, I deserve to be treated as you have treated me! How else could you treat any woman? You're at my service? No, I've been at your service, and in your service for four years. I've served you faithfully, and I've got my wages. Now go to her! Say the same things to her that you've said to me. Whisper you old lies and flatteries to her. Play the same tricks on her that you've played on me. Go to her! Let her serve you as I have done, let her find you as heartless as I have done, and then—kick her from you as you have kicked me. Go to her!

[NORTON stands *very quietly* for some little time.

NORTON. Believe me, I am deeply sensible of the cruel wrong I have done you. I beg your pardon, with all my heart. I am sorry our attachment—our love for each other—should end like this.

LORA. It has ended. Good-night.

NORTON. Good-bye.

[He is going off when CUTLER enters in evening dress.

CUTLER. [Cheerily.] Well, you've come to an understanding, I hope?

NORTON. Yes. Good-night.

CUTLER. Good-night?

NORTON. Good-night. [Bows to LORA, Exit.

CUTLER. One moment, George—you're not going?

[Exit after him.

[*LORA goes very quietly to chair, sits, stares hopelessly out. After a second or two CUTLER enters, very slowly and sadly—he looks at LORA, who sits motionless, tearless; comes up to her, with great sympathy, puts his hand on her shoulder.*

CUTLER. Poor child of the storm !

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE : *The same on an evening in the following June. The windows on the balcony are thrown wide open. As the curtain rises a faint flush of pink is seen along the distant horizon over the intervening wooded June landscape. The sky above is soft evening blue with white fleecy clouds. The sunset advances and the sky darkens through the act ; an orange-pink glow touches the lower clouds and gradually mounts till it compasses the higher clouds; the twilight comes on ; lights dot the darkening plain ; the clouds glow with a darker orange and red as the day dies down into night.*

Discover CUTLER standing above the table right handling some sheets of MS. LORA in a summer dress with a book in her hand enters from the balcony. Her face is a little paler than in the earlier acts, and has a more settled sadness ; her manner is more subdued and restrained.

LORA. [Putting down the book.] Have you finished your article ?

CUTLER. Not quite. It's a very large subject : "The Future of the Human Race."

LORA. That is a large subject.

CUTLER. I've nearly disposed of them. Seccombe is coming in by and by to take down the last sheet and get it off to the printers. Oh, by the way, I'm expecting my little friend Mrs. Janway, and I've asked her husband to meet her. He couldn't get up from Oakminster in time for dinner; so I've put it off and ordered supper instead, if you don't mind?

LORA. [Has taken off her hat.] Not at all. I'm not hungry, and it seems a sin to eat in this heavenly weather.

CUTLER. I hope I shall persuade Will and Evie to stay, but I expect I shall have a pretty stiff job with him.

LORA. I'm sorry she had got herself into such trouble—

CUTLER. Foolish people must needs work out a foolish destiny.

LORA. And wise people too. We're all alike.

CUTLER. No, wise people control their destiny, as you are going to control yours. Come now, what are going to do?

LORA. I shall go down to North Devon for a few weeks—perhaps stay there all the summer.

CUTLER. You'd much better stay on here.

LORA. No, dear sage. You've been very kind to lend me your house, and I've enjoyed being here all this wonderful spring. But now you are home again I feel I must be moving on.

CUTLER. Nonsense! Stay on with me. It's bringing

you round. Last night, when you were singing, you were quite your old self—

LORA. I don't want to be my old self.

CUTLER. Well, a new self.

LORA. No, she might turn out to be a more foolish and more unhappy creature than the old Lora. No, I don't want to be anything or anybody, but just to float on, and let life do what it likes with me, and carry me where it pleases.

CUTLER. But I can't let you drift. This new opera of Treganza's seems to have the right stuff in it, eh?

LORA. Yes—that's another reason why I must go.

CUTLER. What?

LORA. The poor boy has fallen in love with me.

CUTLER. Confound this universal amorosity that's always confounding everything else in the universe. I guessed he had. Well, you can keep him at a safe distance—

LORA. Yes. But I like him, and I don't want to be cruel to him. If I go away from him now, he'll have a bad month or so and forget me. But if we work together on his new opera, and make it a success, he'll only go on falling more deeply in love with me, and then—with his temperament—I might ruin his future and break his heart. And there are too many broken hearts already in the world.

CUTLER. Oh, one more won't matter very much. He'll get over it. You mustn't think of him. You must give all your thoughts to your work for a year

or two, and then, if some decent, kind, sensible fellow comes your way—why not marry him ?

BYE

LORA. [Shakes her head sadly.] Marriage is not for me—now. If I'd not had a voice, I might have had a home and children and friends, and a quiet heart. But now? I'm not fitted for marriage. Oh, pity my husband, if I did marry !

CUTLER. Why ?

LORA. I can't live a home life now. George Norton spoiled me for that. Or perhaps I spoiled myself before I met him. I don't think I have any real life left to live. But if I do grow out of this, and live again, I think it will be in some wild, selfish, reckless way.

CUTLER. No! No! Disordered genius? Unkempt genius? Spendthrift genius? Depraved genius? Crazy genius? No! No! No! Well-ordered genius! Persistent genius! Wise genius! Sane genius!

LORA. Dear sage, do let me know myself. You can't guess what depths there are here. I daren't look at them.

CUTLER. Well, don't. Stay on here. Grow calmer and stronger every day. Steady yourself, and set to work on "Fair Rosamond"—

LORA. That might be the worst thing of all for me.

CUTLER. How ?

LORA. This poor boy—he loves me, and I'm fond of him. His bright eyes, his enthusiasm, and his love for music—he is so young—it all means so much to him—

CUTLER. But you surely aren't going to fall in love with him?

LORA. No, I don't suppose so.

CUTLER. For heaven's sake, no. Not a musician, or an artist, or an actor. Let it be a human being.

LORA. I hope it won't be anybody for his sake, whoever he may be.

CUTLER. Why is he so much to be pitied?

LORA. I can't give him anything worth having. I had the power of constancy. I've lost it. I've lost my moorings. Anything may happen to me. I can't trust myself. If I do love again, I shall be jealous, capricious, ungovernable, unfaithful—

CUTLER. Well, then don't love again. But I suppose you will?

LORA. Yes, I daresay—after a fashion. But not as I loved George. Have you heard from him?

CUTLER. [After a slight hesitation.] Yes. There was a letter waiting for me when I got home yesterday.

LORA. [Indifferently.] Where is he?

CUTLER. First of all, tell me quite truly how you feel towards him.

LORA. Not bitterly. A little tenderly and pityingly.

CUTLER. You have no love left for him?

LORA. Not a spark.

CUTLER. You're sure of that? Your love for him is quite dead?

LORA. Quite. I could meet him almost like a stranger. What a curious mocking thing a dead love is. Like what you showed me in that old urn this morning. All the burning kisses and vows and tears—

nothing but ashes ; a little heap of gray ashes that were once a man. Where is George ?

CUTLER. In London.

LORA. You've seen him ?

CUTLER. Yes, I left him an hour ago.

LORA. I hope he's well and happy.

CUTLER. No. He has had a very bad time. He was taken with typhoid in Italy, and nearly died of it.

LORA. You never told me.

CUTLER. What would have been the use ? You were ill yourself. That laid him up until March. He has had one or two relapses, and is still very weak and shaky.

LORA. And his paroquet ?

CUTLER. She got frightened of infection, robbed him of everything she could lay her hands on, and packed off to Egypt, leaving him to die.

LORA. He needed me then.

CUTLER. Well, he just pulled through, dragged himself to Sicily, and has stayed there ever since. He only got to England on Monday.

LORA. Is he very much broken ?

CUTLER. Yes, and terribly depressed. Not at all like himself. George has lost all his old pride in evil-doing. It's only healthy people who can be joyous sinners.

LORA. What's he going to do ?

CUTLER. I'm afraid he's going to try to see you. [Watching her closely.] I told him it could be only useless and painful to you both.

LORA. Yes.

CUTLER. He's writing to you. Perhaps he'll call.
You won't see him?

LORA. Yes, I think——

CUTLER. No, better not——

LORA. You needn't fear, dear sage. George has
gone out of my life.

CUTLER. Well, who and what is coming into it to
take his place?

LORA. Nothing at present.

CUTLER. Is Treganza coming round this evening?

LORA. Oh yes. He's sure to. You think George
will get over this?

CUTLER. Yes, but it will take some time. It has
knocked him all to pieces.

LORA. I'm so sorry for him.

CUTLER. [Has gone up to balcony and is looking out.]
Isn't that Treganza hanging round outside the palings?

LORA. He does that every evening. He never
comes in, unless I go down to the garden gate and
invite him, dear foolish chivalrous boy. I dare say
he'll be there soon.

CUTLER. Ask him in, and we'll have a little more
"Fair Rosamond."

LORA. [Looking off.] I never grow tired of this land-
scape; and to-night it seems more beautiful than ever.

CUTLER. Ah, the iron old Mother grows tender to
us sometimes. That flush of Northern sunset in the
long June evenings!

LORA. What a pity the longest day will soon be
here—and pass.

[SANDFORD enters.

SANDFORD. [Announces.] Mrs. Janway.

[Enter EVIE. Exit SANDFORD.

[EVIE is dressed in a very smart summer toilette. She looks distressed and downcast, and has the air of a martyr.

EVIE. How d'ye do, dear Guardy? [Kissing CUTLER.]

CUTLER. How are you, my dear?

EVIE. Madame Delmar! [Shaking hands with LORA.]

LORA. How d'ye do? Mr. Cutler tells me you're going to stay and have supper with us—

EVIE. Yes—I don't know—yes, I suppose.

LORA. Then we shall meet again, sha'n't we?

[Goes off at balcony.

[EVIE has thrown herself into a chair, and has begun to cry a little.

CUTLER. Well, Evie, this is rather a sad bit of business.

EVIE. Isn't it? Did you ever know a woman so pursued by misfortune as I am?

CUTLER. Never.

EVIE. Every high and noble thing I do only brings me greater misery.

CUTLER. Our virtues betray us as often as our faults.

EVIE. Have you arranged for Will to meet me?

CUTLER. Yes. He's coming up from Oakminster.

[Taking out watch.] He'll be here soon.

EVIE. You got my letter from Lucerne?

CUTLER. Yes, but it was a little disjointed—

EVIE. Can you wonder, considering the awful state I was in?

CUTLER. Tell me exactly how it happened. Your first letters from Tarasp were so cheerful. You seemed to have settled down so comfortably with Miss Lambert and Karlinski.

EVIE. Yes, so we did. Of course I had no idea of the dreadful reputation Karlinski had.

CUTLER. As a violinist?

EVIE. No, as a—— He has had love affairs with everybody.

CUTLER. Busy creature! But you and Miss Lambert were staying at the other hotel?

EVIE. Yes, but I've since found out that he had an affair with her.

CUTLER. Quite an affairist, it seems.

EVIE. Yes, and at his own hotel there was a Mrs. Berriman—I'm almost sure—and a tall, light-haired woman——

CUTLER. Are these things possible in the High Alps? And do the Eternal Heavens look down unmoved?

EVIE. Guardy, you might be serious for once, when you see the terrible position I am in. [Crying.

CUTLER. I'm sorry, my dear. Tell me the rest of it.

EVIE. Well, it was all a carefully planned scheme between Mary Lambert and Karlinski to get hold of my money.

CUTLER. Sort of three card trick, eh?

EVIE. Yes. It was Karlinski who advised me to take Mary Lambert out to Switzerland with me to

train my voice. They knew I was divorcing Will, and that Will was making me a handsome settlement. So they planned that Karlinski should marry me for the sake of my fortune.

CUTLER. Les affaires sont les affaires.

EVIE. They thought, of course, when they got me out there, that I should be persuaded to accept Karlinski. But when they found I was determined to live for art alone, they had to try another plan.

CUTLER. What was that?

EVIE. We stayed on at Tarasp till the end of March.

CUTLER. They attending to their own "affairs," and you training your voice——

EVIE. Yes. And I wrote a small volume of poems. I'll show them to you some day.

CUTLER. Thank you. Poems? You were well on your way to your great future.

EVIE. Yes, and if it hadn't been for my generous confiding nature I should have realized it. For I have got it in me, haven't I? [*He doesn't reply.*] I'm sure I have. I'm sure I have.

CUTLER. Well, you trained your voice?

EVIE. Yes, and it developed splendidly. You've no idea what my voice has become—quite a rich powerful organ. So I decided to give a concert. That gave Mary Lambert and Karlinski their chance.

CUTLER. Chance of what?

EVIE. Of getting me into their power. They had a lot of musical friends at Davos; so they persuaded me to give the concert there. They went on to arrange it, leaving me to follow in a few days. Mary

Lambert had begged me to lend her my maid, as there was so much to do for the concert. So I had to go on to Davos alone. When I got just beyond Sus, there was a heavy snowstorm, and I was forced to take shelter in a wretched dirty little inn at the top of the pass. The next day Karlinski came on to fetch me to Davos. But it snowed worse than ever, and his horses broke down, at least he said so. So he pretended he must stay on at the inn. Of course he had planned it all.

CUTLER. He could scarcely have planned the snow-storm.

EVIE. No, but he ought to have fought his way out of it, to save my reputation. Instead of that he stayed; and there I was, shut up in that dreadful hole with Karlinski for over a fortnight, and nobody within miles, except the dirty innkeeper and his dirty fat wife, and the chickens.

CUTLER. Art demands heavy sacrifices from her victims.

EVIE. Oh, please don't. Can't you see what a terrible situation I was in? Karlinski would keep on making love to me. I put myself under the protection of the dirty landlady, but she only laughed at me, and pretended to think I was married to Karlinski. Of course Karlinski had bribed them.

CUTLER. Couldn't you possibly get through?

EVIE. No, the roads were quite blocked. And Mary Lambert kept on advertising the concert, with Karlinski for my accompanist. When we did get down to Davos, I didn't want to give the concert, but

they said all the tickets were taken, and I must keep faith with the public. Well, the night came and the room was crammed. I had caught a dreadful cold on the pass, but still I sang splendidly—considering I had lost my high notes. But there wasn't any applause, scarcely a hand.

CUTLER. Ungrateful brutes, the public.

EVIE. No. They appreciated me, but they didn't applaud.

CUTLER. Held themselves in, eh? Why did they do that?

EVIE. Because Mary Lambert put it about the hotel that Karlinski and I were engaged, and that I was going to marry him as soon as I got my divorce. I found that everybody had been talking about me; and the next day the best people in the hotel wouldn't speak to me. Can you imagine anything more dreadful?

CUTLER. What did you do?

EVIE. I explained to them that there was nothing between Karlinski and me,—absolutely nothing; but I could see they didn't believe me. Karlinski and Mary Lambert tried to persuade me that the only thing to do was to let Will make Karlinski co-respondent in the divorce case, and then he would marry me. Of course I refused, and got away to Lucerne. There I happened to meet the Pumphreys. I told them what had happened, and they took me in. Then I wrote a full account of it to Will, but he only wrote a cold, heartless letter. And now he won't have anything to do with me.

[Whimpering.]

CUTLER. How did it get into the papers ?

EVIE. Karlinski must have sent paragraphs all round, thinking it would force me to marry him. Will must contradict the papers at once.

CUTLER. It's a dangerous thing to contradict newspapers. They always have the last word.

EVIE. But who is to defend my reputation ? I can't defend it myself. Somebody must defend it. Surely it's my husband's duty to defend my reputation.

CUTLER. But, my dear Evie, you are getting a divorce.

EVIE. No, I'm not.

CUTLER. You're not ?

EVIE. I can't have a divorce now. Naturally, I don't want one. I've instructed my lawyers to withdraw my petition.

CUTLER. But Will seems anxious to go on.

EVIE. He can't. I've taken it off the list. Guardy, you must see that I can't go about the world alone, with this disgrace hanging over me. The only possible thing for me to do now is to go back to Oakminster as Will's wife. That will convince everybody I am quite innocent.

CUTLER. But Will doesn't seem very much inclined to take you back.

EVIE. Oh, but he must. He knows that I have behaved quite properly throughout. You know it, Guardy, don't you ? You're sure of it ?

CUTLER. Quite sure, my dear.

EVIE. Then why shouldn't he take me back ? Surely

it's his duty as my husband to stand by me. Especially as I've been trapped into this awful position through no fault of my own. I couldn't have avoided it, could I ?

CUTLER. Only by remaining at Oakminster as his wife, instead of flying off to the High Alps.

EVIE. But then I should have had to sacrifice my whole artistic career. And because I dared to follow the highest that was in me, I find all the hotel visitors cutting me, and everybody believing that I'm not a good woman. Guardy, why are things like that allowed to happen ?

CUTLER. The monstrously unfair treatment that Providence deals out to deserving people is fully discussed in the Book of Job. The only conclusion reached there, is the violently improbable one of a happy ending.

EVIE. [Sobbing.] If it had been my own fault I could have borne it——

[Enter SANDFORD.]

SANDFORD. Mr. Janway is in the next room, sir.

CUTLER. Show him in.

SANDFORD. I mentioned that Mrs. Janway was with you, and he asked me to tell you that he wishes to see you alone.

CUTLER. Very well, Sandford. I'll be there in a minute.

[Exit SANDFORD.]

EVIE. You see ! He won't even do me the bare justice to see me, and hear my story.

CUTLER. You have quite made up your mind not to have a divorce ?

EVIE. Quite. So he must take me home with him. He can't divorce me now that he has taken some person to Brighton, and given my lawyers the evidence. You might point that out to him.

CUTLER. I suppose I may tell him that if he does take you back, you'll do everything you can to make him comfortable, and the home happy?

EVIE. Of course I shall. I always have sacrificed myself to his wishes, when they haven't interfered with my sense of what is clearly due to myself.

CUTLER. [Going off.] We'll hear what Will has got to say.

EVIE. [Bursts into fresh tears.] Guardy, why is it that I am always singled out for unhappiness and misfortune?

[CUTLER shrugs his shoulders and goes off.

[EVIE continues crying. LORA enters at window and comes down towards EVIE.

LORA. [Seeing that EVIE is crying.] I beg pardon.
[Is going off.

EVIE. No, please don't go.

LORA. [Coming back to her.] Can I help you at all?

EVIE. No, thank you? At least—I suppose you have heard of my undeserved trouble?

LORA. Mr. Cutler has given me a few particulars. I'm very sorry. I hope it will all come right.

EVIE. Yes, but even if it does, my artistic career is utterly ruined for the time. Who knows? I may never be able to show the world what I have in me. [Looking enviously at LORA.] Oh, what triumphs you've had! You have been lucky.

LORA. Have I?

EVIE. Well, haven't you? Your pictures are in all the shop windows; and they write to you for your autograph; and you get columns of praise in all the papers whenever you appear. You've had nothing but one long round of success and happiness.

LORA. You think I've been happy?

EVIE. Well, if you haven't you ought to have been. Really it seems to me that some women are never satisfied. Look how different my life has been from yours.

LORA. I hope so.

EVIE. What do you mean? You must be very hard to please.

LORA. I don't think you'd say that, if you knew what my life has been.

EVIE. Tell me. I've often wished to question you. Do tell me—

LORA. No, it's not worth telling.

EVIE. Yes, do please. It may be a guide to me in my own career when I take it up again.

LORA. You're going on with your music?

EVIE. Yes, I'm fondest of that. But just now I can't decide. I may devote myself to poetry, or painting. There are so many objectionable things and people connected with music—especially for a woman, aren't there?

LORA. Yes. I wouldn't risk it, if I were you. You wouldn't, if you knew what I've gone through.

EVIE. What have you gone through? Tell me. I

should be so grateful. Of course I don't want to know your private life—

LORA. Oh, I don't mind your knowing. There is nothing in my private life that isn't known to somebody who is no more to me than you are.

EVIE. Then do tell me.

LORA. [Looks at her very pityingly for a while.] Yes, it might be a guide to you.

EVIE. Where were you brought up?

LORA. [Speaking all through in a quiet, passionless, matter-of-fact tone, without any trace of self-pity.] In Halligan's menagerie. I never saw my father. My mother was called Signora Gianelli, the renowned lion-tamer. One of the first things I remember was her coaxing me to stroke a lion's neck.

EVIE. And did you?

LORA. Yes. They were well fed and harmless. She was plucky and healthy and handsome, with Italian blood in her. She gave me her pluck. I've scarcely ever known fear.

EVIE. How delightful that must be!

LORA. She didn't earn very much, so when I was six, she took me into the cage with her. They brought out a large yellow and red poster of my mother with her foot on a lion's neck, and me in her arms. That was on all the walls of the towns we visited. So you see I've always been used to that kind of fame. That's the reason I don't think much of it now.

EVIE. But it must have been very exciting.

LORA. No; it was everyday work. I suppose I was an attractive child, for when I was ten they put

me outside at every performance to dance, and make a speech inviting the crowd to come in. I liked that, because I had a red velvet spangled dress, and everybody noticed me. I had to speak up. That gave my voice its power. There was always the crowd, and the music, and the flaring lamps. I did that for three years. If ever I've been happy in my life, it was then.

EVIE. You had to mix with a lot of common people?

LORA. I had to mix with human nature. I had to put up with a good deal at times, and listen to bad language and coarse jests. But I took no notice of it, and the menagerie people were kind and hardworking, and quite respectable.

EVIE. How very interesting!

LORA. One night at Gloucester a dear old lady stopped and talked to me. She asked my mother and me to her house. In the end she took me away from the menagerie, and sent me to a fashionable boarding school at Eastbourne.

EVIE. I wondered how it was that you are so—so refined.

LORA. Am I refined? The girls at the school made my life a hell to me. I wasn't of their class; they scarcely spoke to me, except to taunt me, and mimic my bad manners. But I was quick, and I soon learned to talk and behave like them. And I had music and singing lessons. But, oh, the misery of that time! After two years I ran away, back to my mother and the menagerie. I tried to take up that life again, but I couldn't. I hated it. Then, one night, Stanley, the

tame old lion, got angry, and nearly tore my mother to pieces. She just escaped with her life, but she was a wreck, and fit for nothing.

EVIE. What did you do then ?

LORA. [Very quiet all through.] Starved. Starved. Starved. For four years my mother and I starved together. I've sung and danced in the streets. I've sung and danced at race-meetings. I've sung and danced in public-houses. Then my mother died, and I got an engagement in the chorus of a provincial opera company. The next two or three years I only half-starved. I married a careless good-for-nothing, a weak brute, who took my salary, and got drunk and tortured me. I left him, and took up with other men—I don't know who, I don't remember—what does it matter ? They were nothing to me, though I lived with them. Some of them were kind, and good comrades. But they were no more than chance acquaintances. I took up with them, because I was quite hopeless of ever getting out of it—they were part of it all—dirty lodging-houses, dirty meals, dirty theatres, dirty dresses ; nights in trains ; salaries not paid ; no future, nothing to live for—just hurried, helpless getting through from day to day.

EVIE. I had no idea what that kind of life was like. It must have been very disagreeable.

LORA. But I worked hard all the while, though I hadn't the least hope. I knew I had a voice. So have many singers in the street. I never expected to get a hearing. You think I've been successful ? For years I had nothing but failure, failure, failure,

disappointment, disappointment, disappointment. But I worked on. Then Lewis Gordon sent out a new opera company to tour the provinces. I got an engagement for small parts. He took a great deal of notice of me. I saw that I had attracted him. In the vacation he sent me to Berlin and Dresden, to study under good masters. How I worked then! When I came back in the autumn, there was another woman in the company—Ella Raymond. She could sing too; and she did all she could to get hold of Lewis Gordon. It was a neck-and-neck race between her and me, for Gordon and the public. How that woman and I hated each other! We quarrelled and almost fought on the stage. We did every mean thing we could think of to get the better of each other, and put each other wrong with the audience. I saw it was to be her or me. I determined it should be me. It was my only chance. I got hold of Lewis Gordon, and I downed her. Yes, I crushed her. She had to leave the company, and she never got another good engagement. Then I was sorry for her. She fell ill, poor creature. I can't tell you what I suffered for what I had done to her. I made her a good allowance that kept her comfortably. When I could, I nursed her; and she died kissing me and calling me her only friend. You're shocked and surprised at all this?

EVIE. Do, please, go on.

LORA. I kept on working. I got on very well with Lewis Gordon. He was an educated man, and a gentleman. But he hadn't any character, and I

couldn't love him. Just then, if I had met a man whom I could love, I'd have easily died for him. We drifted away from each other; and he found another attachment. He got tired of losing money, and gave up the company. Then I got an engagement at Covent Garden. I made a great success in a small part, and the next day I met a man whom I could love. That was the first time I had really loved. I didn't know I had it in me, to love a man as I loved him. And now I don't know why it was. It isn't good women who can give a man the most unselfish devoted love. They are faithful, without knowing what faithfulness means. It's such as I who can be faithful to a man. And I was faithful. I did love him. That made me sing. Then they found out I had a voice. I made success after success. I couldn't help it. It was all so easy.

EVIE. Surely you were happy then?

LORA. No, I was never sure of him for a moment. It was I who loved him. He loved me too in a way, but I kept the bank of our love. I stood to lose. I had rages and torments of jealousy, I was never free from it. Very often my happiness with him was misery, worse than misery itself. I never knew how I could suffer till then. No, it wasn't happiness. It was fever. Happy? I've been happy, as a drunkard is happy. But real sure happiness? I've never had a day of it in my life. I don't know what it means. Now you know all about me.

[She has spoken very quietly throughout, as if telling the history of another person.]

EVIE. Thank you for telling me all this. It must have been very painful to speak of.

LORA. [Indifferent.] No, it's past. It doesn't mean much to me now. But you know what I have had to go through to be what I am. Do you think it's worth while to risk it?

EVIE. No, you've quite decided me against music. I shall give myself entirely to poetry. I have written enough poems to make a small volume——

LORA. Wouldn't it be better to give yourself entirely to your home and husband? You have a chance, such as I have never had. [Very enviously.] You may have a child——

EVIE. I'm not fond of children. And they would interfere—— [CUTLER looks in at the door.

CUTLER. Evie, will you come this way a moment?

[Exit, leaving the door open.

EVIE. Thank you so much. What you have told me will be such a guide to me. I'm so much obliged to you. [Exit.

[LORA looks after her very pityingly; then dismisses her with a little helpless movement, and goes out on to the balcony; stands there watching the setting sun; waves her hand and beckons to some one in the garden.

LORA. [Calling off.] Good evening. Yes, come up!

[JOHN TREGANZA joins her on the balcony. He is a bright-eyed, swarthy, handsome young CORNISHMAN of twenty-five; with a contagious earnestness and excitement; a deep

voice, with a slight West Country accent; joyous, animated, hopeful, alert. He has some sheets of music in his hand. They come into the room.

JOHN. You don't mind my coming round?

LORA. No, I'm pleased. How have you been getting on?

JOHN. Splendidly. I've been out in the woods all the afternoon, working like a steam engine. I can't stop myself. I've got Rosamond's song at last. It has been buzzing in my head all day. And I know if you'll let me be with you for a quarter of an hour, I can go out and score it down right off. Give me a quarter of an hour.

[Looking at her with the most ardent love and longing.

LORA. An hour, if you like. We're having a late supper to-night; and Mr. Cutler wants you to come in and try some of the numbers.

JOHN. Yes, but I must get down Rosamond's song first. Let me be with you and talk to you.

[His eyes are fixed greedily upon her.

LORA. Very well. Tell me some more about your boy days.

JOHN. No, let me talk about you; because I don't seem to have had any life before I met you. Ah, you don't know! The first time I heard you sing at Covent Garden! I went home just like a madman. I walked all the way to Norwood. It was moonlight, and London was like a fairy city. I came up the next night you sang. I never missed a single

performance all the season. I used to wait outside the gallery door from three o'clock, and I always got the middle front seat. I clapped and shouted all through, and at the end I stayed and brought you on time after time. Then I used to go round to the stage door, and wait till you came out, and run after your motor till I couldn't breathe——

LORA. Poor boy !

JOHN. No, no. There never was anybody so happy as I was—as I am. *[Looking at her.]*

LORA. Now we've had enough about me. Let's talk about yourself.

JOHN. No, there's only you in all the world.

[Approaching as if to embrace her.]

LORA. You won't make love to me, will you ?

JOHN. Yes. Don't turn away from me. Let me love you ! I don't want you to love me, if you can't. But let me love you. That will be enough.

LORA. *[Gently pushing him from her, going away from him.]* Tell me about the old church and the organ—and your mother.

JOHN. She used to say, "Now Jan, my sonny boy, daun't 'ee be vulish weth thase heere music. Tez oal very well, Jan, but thee've got thy living to make, Jan." And then I used to go to the old church, up to the organ loft, and play till it was dark, and when I got back to supper she'd say, "Thee'm maazed weth thase heere music, Jan. 'Twill send thee into the county 'sylum up to Bodmin, Jan." And I used to say, "I caent help ut, Mother." And then one night she gave in and said : "Tez no gude arguing

weth 'ee, Jan. If tez to be, tez to be, and so God bless 'ee, Jan." [Approaching her.] I wish you'd call me "Jan." Won't you? Do! Only once!

LORA. [Very tenderly.] Jan!

JOHN. Ah!

[*He tries to clasp her, but she gently repulses him.*

LORA. No. I've told you that you mustn't make love to me. Listen, Jan. Your mother's dead. I'd like to be your mother, just for ten minutes. Will you let me? And will you hear what I have to say, quite patiently and quietly?

JOHN. Yes.

LORA. [Putting her hand very affectionately on his arm.] If I were your mother, I'd say to you, "You're going to be very successful, Jan. Perhaps you'll make a great name in music. And you're going to be praised, and flattered, and made much of. You mustn't think too much of that. It means so little. But you know that; because, you know, the only praise that's worth having is the praise that our own heart whispers to our own ear, when we are sure we have struck the right note."

JOHN. Yes, I know that.

LORA. So you'll keep your head when popular success comes, won't you, my sonny boy? And you'll have your failures and disappointments—bitter ones, perhaps. They're good, too. They teach us. You'll make your failures help you, won't you, Jan?

JOHN. Yes, but I couldn't fail if only you'd care for me a little.

[*Looking at her with very great longing.*

LORA. You promised you'd hear me. Yes [*looking at him very tenderly and wistfully*], you'll be successful and famous, perhaps, and the world will pet you and take you up. And you'll be loved, Jan, by many women.

JOHN. I only want to be loved by you.

LORA. You'll be loved by many women——

JOHN. But I can never love any woman but you.

LORA. [*Shakes her head.*] You'll love many women. Your own mother wouldn't have spoken to you like this. She didn't know the world that you're going to live in. I do know it. Don't let it spoil you, Jan. Don't let women spoil you. You'll have to love them; and [*looking at him very sadly*] perhaps they'll master you, and eat away all the freshness from your work, and break your heart.

JOHN. There's only one woman who can break my heart.

LORA. There are many. [*Looking at him very tenderly.*] Oh, it will be a pity!

JOHN. What?

LORA. If you don't reach the best of all. But you will, won't you, Jan? You'll be loved many times, and have much trouble with it all; but perhaps, some day, you'll find the one woman who can give you all her heart, all herself.

JOHN. [*Passionately.*] Can't you?

LORA. I can't. But some woman will. You'll know her when you meet her. Treat her very tenderly; be faithful to her; guard her love—it's a great possession. If there is anything worth guarding and cherishing on

earth, that's it. Remember what I've said, Jan. And God bless 'ee, my sonny boy !

JOHN. [Imploringly.] Can't you love me ?

LORA. [Shakes her head sadly.] I'm not fitted for such a love as you have to give. I'm not worthy of it. I might not be faithful to you—even if I could grow to love you.

JOHN. But you could grow to love me—you shall !

LORA. Not now, Jan. Don't press me.

JOHN. You don't love any one else ?

LORA. No.

JOHN. Your heart is free ?

LORA. My heart is dead, I think.

JOHN. I'll bring it back to life. I'll make you love me.

LORA. Ah, no, Jan. For your own sake, don't try. Suppose I could love you, what could it mean for both of us ? I'm much older than you.

JOHN. You've many years of love to give to some one. Give it to me.

LORA. I wouldn't be so cruel to you.

JOHN. It would be the best thing Heaven could give me. What is your future going to be without love ?

LORA. My future ? Don't speak of it. I haven't any.

JOHN. Yes, with me. You're going to sing my Rosamond ?

LORA. Yes, I suppose.

JOHN. Won't you promise ?

LORA. Yes, if you'll promise not to make love to me.

JOHN. I won't make a promise, because I know I couldn't keep it. But if you don't sing it, you will break my heart.

LORA. I won't do that.

JOHN. [After a pause.] Give me one kiss!

LORA. Ah, no, don't ask me.

JOHN. Yes, one. I can do Rosamond's song then. Only one. I'll not ask for another till you give it me of your own free will—after our great success.

LORA. You'll swear that?

JOHN. I swear it. Give me one kiss.

LORA. You are not to kiss me. [She kisses him very quietly and tenderly on his cheek.]

JOHN. Now I can do it! I'll run round to the little inn parlour, and score it down right away. [Snatching up his music.] I'll be back with it, done. [On balcony.] Come down to the gate with me, won't you?

[She joins him on balcony and they go off together. WILL JANWAY and CUTLER enter. WILL flings himself into an arm-chair, evidently disgusted and annoyed. CUTLER turns up the electric lights.]

WILL. Well, this is a confounded pretty state of affairs, isn't it? And after I had faked up that beastly three days at Brighton.

CUTLER. Your Brighton excursion, like misconduct generally, seems to have been largely superfluous.

WILL. And the only time the lady and I showed up together on the front, we ran straight into the Oakminster curate, and he would stop and talk. Of course I had to introduce the lady as my cousin. Well, the curate is a champion idiot, but he wasn't idiot enough to believe that; especially as the lady didn't look like a genuine cousin, or a genuine anything, except a genuine what-she-was. So the curate fished out my hotel, and made inquiries; and when he got back to Oakminster, he began talking about it. It got all over the town, and the vicar called to lecture me. Well, I couldn't stand his rowing, so he has made it pretty hot for me all round. Pumphrey is his churchwarden, and the Pumphreys have cut me. And I tell you, just at present Oakminster doesn't regard me as a highly moral character.

CUTLER. Never mind that, while you can so regard yourself. As doubtless you can, and do.

WILL. Well, I don't know about being very moral; but I have been jolly badly used.

CUTLER. Don't think me curious; but the last six months—how have your feminine relationships been—shall I say “functioning”?

WILL. Ghastly.

CUTLER. You left here last November, intending to make a damned fool of yourself with some unknown fair.

WILL. I didn't intend—in fact, I intended to avoid it—as far as possible.

CUTLER. It was not possible. What happened? Don't give me any particulars, but just a general impression.

WILL. Well—oh, well—I'm hanged if I know exactly what has happened. Heaps of things I don't want to remember. It has been another silly mess up. I don't know—I want to go straight—I'm pretty sick of it.

CUTLER. Then you don't contemplate your behaviour the last six months with unmingled pride and satisfaction?

WILL. No, I'm hanged if I do. Anything but. I'm hanged well ashamed of myself. Though, under the circumstances, I don't see that I could have acted any differently.

CUTLER. Suppose you separate from Evie, will you be able to—pardon me using your own words—will you be able to shun the destiny of again making a damned fool of yourself? What do you propose to do now?

WILL. I *don't propose* to do anything. But I know jolly well what I *shall* do, if I'm left to myself.

CUTLER. With that modest estimate of your moral stability, wouldn't it be better to make it up with Evie?

WILL. I don't see what else I can do. Because you see the Pumphreys and most of my old friends at Oakminster are cutting me, by the vicar's orders. And Evie met the Pumphreys in Switzerland and got round them, and persuaded them I've treated her very badly. And if I don't take her back, the Pumphreys are going to invite her down to Oakminster to stay with them. And she'll make every-

body believe that I'm a brute and that's she's a martyr. Pleasant outlook, eh ?

CUTLER. I'm afraid you'll have to take her back.

WILL. I suppose I shall. [*Breaks out wrathfully.*] How the deuce do women expect to be treated ? How is a man to treat them ?

CUTLER. After thirty, the philosopher treats them as a side issue in life.

WILL. A side issue ?

CUTLER. God took Eve from under Adam's ribs as a profound symbol that man should always regard woman as a side issue.

WILL. But they won't let you regard them as side issues. I can tell you one thing—what with Evie and the vicar, and the Oakminster people generally, I'm not going to enjoy myself.

CUTLER. Endurance, not enjoyment, is man's pass-key through this world. Throw yourself heart and soul into your business ; stick to your work ; be kind and forbearing with Evie ; humour her as much as you can ; consult her wishes, and receive her friends ; put her in her right position, and keep her there.

WILL. What on earth is a woman's right position ? Will you please tell me that ?

CUTLER. When the buoyant Panurge went to Dodona to seek counsel in matrimony—Rabelais doesn't mention this, but it's authentic—Panurge asked the oracle, " What is woman's rightful position ? " The oracle replied, " Put her above you, she is still beneath you. Put her beneath you, she is still

above you. Put her on a level with you, and together you sink into sub-bottomless chaos."

WILL. I wish some oracle would tell me what to do with Evie. I suppose I shall have to take her back.

CUTLER. If you do, you'll have the satisfaction, denied to most husbands who take their wives back, of knowing that she has behaved herself with perfect propriety during her absence from you.

WILL. I suppose there is no doubt about that?

CUTLER. Not the least.

WILL. Well, that's something——

[SANDFORD enters with a little note

SANDFORD. [Giving it to WILL.] Mrs. Janway asked me to give you this, sir.

[WILL takes the note and reads it: *Exit SANDFORD.*

WILL. [Having read note, shows great disgust.] What do you think? She has gone to get her luggage, says she'll bring it to my rooms at the Lancaster. I shall find her there waiting for me.

[With great disgust.

CUTLER. There, you see, matrimonial problems solve themselves, if we only allow them.

WILL. They know me so well at the Lancaster. I can't turn her out and have a row——

CUTLER. Is it ever worth while to have a row with, or about, a woman?

WILL. I suppose she'll hang on to her artistic tomfoolery.

CUTLER. I should let her. It will leave you free to make carpets.

WILL. Then there's her confounded lawyer's bill for the divorce. I shall have to pay up.

CUTLER. To pay up is a token of masculinity, like a stag's antlers. They can't deprive us of that.

WILL. [Desperately.] I've a jolly good mind to—

CUTLER. To do what?

WILL. [With a gesture of despair.] I dunnow—

[Enter SANDFORD.

[SANDFORD announces MR. NORTON.

[Enter GEORGE NORTON. Exit SANDFORD.

[NORTON is much changed in manner—he is pale and languid, as if recovering from a long weakening illness. His pallor and the sharpness of his features make him even more handsome and distinguished.

CUTLER. Oh, George, I scarcely expected you.

NORTON. I hope you don't mind. How d'ye do, Janway?

WILL. How are you?

[Shaking hands.

NORTON. Just turning the corner, after a bad bout of typhoid. You're looking well.

WILL. I'm splendid.

NORTON. How's Mrs. Janway?

WILL. Oh, she's capital, thanks.

NORTON. Give her my kind regards.

WILL. I will. [To CUTLER.] I'll ring you up in the morning.

CUTLER. Do. Bring Evie here to dinner to-morrow night. [Shaking hands.] My young friend Treganza

shall give you some bits out of his new opera, "Fair Rosamond."

WILL. Thanks. Evie's fond of music. Well, I'll be getting back to her.

[CUTLER sees him off and closes door after him.

CUTLER. This is too bad of you, George.

NORTON. I couldn't stick it in those rooms all the evening. So I thought I'd come up and see her.

CUTLER. No, George. She has only just pulled round, after months of terrible weakness and depression. I can't let you upset her, and throw her back again.

NORTON. I won't upset her. I'll only just see her and get her answer.

CUTLER. No—

[LORA appears on balcony and comes in. She has a little shock of surprise, and then comes down to him very simply and kindly; holds out her hand.

LORA. George—

[He takes her hand, bends over it, kisses it tenderly.

NORTON. Cutler isn't giving me a very warm welcome, and I was rather afraid you might order me off the premises.

LORA. You know I wouldn't do that.

[She cannot help showing that she is moved; goes away from him, stands apart.

CUTLER. Now, George! Just say "How d'ye do?" and "Good-bye"—

NORTON. No ; I must have a few minutes with her alone. [To LORA.] You won't refuse me ?

CUTLER. But I must.

LORA. No. [To CUTLER.] It will be best. Yes, please.

CUTLER. [After showing hesitation.] I shall be back in three minutes. [Exit.

LORA. You've been ill. I'm so sorry. [Looking at him searchingly.] You've been very ill ?

NORTON. Yes, I had a very near shave. Twice I was all but gone—they did bring me a priest—upon my word, I was half inclined to give him a job. If I'd got a little more dotty, I believe they would have smuggled me into the Church.

LORA. But you're better now—you'll soon be well. You have a splendid constitution.

NORTON. I had a splendid constitution, but this has knocked it to bits. Oh, I shall come round, but I've got to go through months of infernal "blues." Good lord ! it isn't living ! It's just hanging on in this rotten world, and wishing I was out of it. I've had my revolver taken away for fear I might use it.

LORA. You won't think of that ?

NORTON. No, I dare say I shall hang on ; though I don't see why I should. I'm no use to myself or anyone else, and I'm as weak as a starved rat.

LORA. Poor fellow !

NORTON. Oh, I deserve it. Well, you've got your revenge, haven't you ?

LORA. I never wished for that. Even now, if there were anything I could do to help you, I'd do it.

NORTON. Well, there's nobody living who can help me out of this hole except you. But I don't like to ask you.

LORA. What could I do ?

NORTON. I've treated you worse than any man ever treated a woman. Will you forgive me, if I offer you the last and worst insult, and ask you to marry me ?

LORA. I couldn't do that, George. It wouldn't help you, and it wouldn't mean anything to me—now.

NORTON. You don't care for me any longer ?

LORA. I don't love you any longer. You killed my love in this room last November. Don't let us speak about it.

NORTON. You must have suffered horribly.

LORA. I was just numbed for months, just dead. I suppose I felt it so much, that I scarcely felt it at all. I went through all those months as if I were somebody else. Mr. Cutler took a furnished house for me in the next road, and did all he could. Then he went abroad, and I came here. I've gradually come to life again these last few weeks, and it has been so strange to find that I don't love you. It all seems so curious and far away, like a picture that somebody else has painted—and it's my own past life, and my love for you.

NORTON. It hasn't all gone, Lora ?

LORA. Quite. There's nothing so dead as a dead love, is there ? Believe me, George, nothing can bring back my love for you. I'm so sorry—for your sake, so sorry !

NORTON. What a fool I've been? How you loved me!

LORA. Yes, and it was all so useless, so wasted; we were like children who found a heap of diamonds, and thought they were pebbles, and threw them away into the mud.

NORTON. Won't you give me another chance, Lora? I know I'm a lame duck just now, but the doctors say I shall pick myself out of this, and be as good a man as ever I was.

LORA. Yes, you'll come to life again, as I am doing; and then you'll find, as you did before, that I'm not very much to you——

NORTON. You needn't remind me what a skunk I was to you.

LORA. I didn't mean to hurt you. But when you get well, you won't be quite the same; things will change with you, as they have changed with me; you'll only wonder at the past, and not feel it. And you'll meet some other woman who will love you——

NORTON. God help her, poor wretch, if I do. I shall make a pretty bad catch for any woman. I should make a pretty bad catch for you. I don't pretend I'm offering you anything that's worth having. But I wouldn't treat you as I did—I can promise that.

LORA. Don't ask me, George; it's impossible.

NORTON. You haven't made any other plans?

LORA. No, I have no plans.

NORTON. Won't you give me a trial? I've seen my wife's solicitors, and she will agree to a divorce. So I shall be quite free. I'm offering to marry you, because

I want to show you that I'm ready to start on fresh lines; and you'll always have that claim on me——

LORA. What claim? I didn't hold you by love. How could I hope to hold you by marriage?

NORTON. That's true. But it would give you a position——

LORA. What position? What position has your wife had all these years?

NORTON. I've never worried her—she has been quite free to do as she likes.

LORA. I don't want that position.

NORTON. And you know I never loved her.

LORA. You did love me?

NORTON. Yes, but I never found out how much till these last few months, since I've been on my back. And I've got months of it yet. Every time the clock ticks I feel I must dash something at it, and stop it. But it ticks and ticks; and I lie there and think and think—— That first season of yours at Covent Garden, our first drive down to Richmond——

LORA. Don't, George—ah, please don't——

NORTON. No, it's not fair on you. Well, here I am, on my beam ends, knocked into a cocked hat; I never was worth your caring for, and I never shall be. But won't you give me another chance?

LORA. [Shakes her head.] Don't press me. It would be such a terrible mistake for both of us.

Norton. It would be a terrible mistake for you. But it's the only thing that would make life worth having for me. [She shakes her head.] I dare say you're right. I'm such a crock——

LORA. Oh, I can't bear to see you so weak and helpless. If I were sure it would make you well and happy, I think I could bring myself to it——

NORTON. And you will? That's like you, Lora! You are a jewel! [CUTLER has entered.]

CUTLER. [After a look at them.] Now, George. You're an invalid. It's time you were safely in bed——

NORTON. No, I'm going to stay, if you don't mind. [CUTLER shows annoyance, looks at LORA for an explanation, looks at NORTON.] Lora's going to come back to me, and pick me out of this hole——

CUTLER. [Looking sternly at LORA.] She isn't going to do anything so foolish, so criminal.

LORA. Oh, I don't know! George, don't ask me——

NORTON. I promise, I swear you shall never regret it.

CUTLER. No, she shall never regret it, because she shall never do it. [Looking at LORA.]

NORTON. It's for her to decide, isn't it?

CUTLER. No. I'm going to decide for her. I have decided. Now, my lad, back to your hotel, and your nurse, and your slops.

NORTON. [Standing firm.] No. Lora, I know now what I've got. I'll never throw it away again.

[Trying to go to her.]

CUTLER. [Intercepting.] George, this is too bad. She has been ill. I've brought her round. I'm her doctor, and I won't have her disturbed. Be off with you.

[Rings bell.]

NORTON. What does she say?

[LORA has shown signs of a great struggle.

LORA. I can't say anything now. Let me think it over. I'll write to you to-morrow.

CUTLER. She'll write to you to-morrow. I'll bring you the letter myself.

NORTON. No—

CUTLER. Yes. [SANDFORD appears at door.

CUTLER. Taxi, Sandford. [Exit SANDFORD.

NORTON. You aren't going to kick me out?

CUTLER. George, I'm very fond of you, as you know. But I'd kick you every yard of the way from here to your hotel, rather than let her go back to you.

NORTON. Lora—

LORA. Please go now. I'll write. Please go!

NORTON. [After a pause.] I've got another lively night in front of me.

[Exit. CUTLER goes with him to the door, looks at LORA, who has gone to the sofa, closes door, comes to her.

CUTLER. You love him still, then?

LORA. No, not at all—in that way. My love is quite dead.

CUTLER. Then why sacrifice your whole future to a man you don't love?

LORA. I can't bear to see him suffer, and not try to help him. I know it's foolish, but I can't help it. I always give money to a beggar, even if I know he's an impostor, and even if it won't help him.

CUTLER. That's a divine gift, too. But it's a very mischievous one. Don't you see that if you go back

to him now it will be a meaner, crueler martyrdom than before?

LORA. Oh yes, I know. But I want to help him—

CUTLER. You can't. But you can drag yourself down again; you can spoil that wonderful voice of yours; you can waste the next four years on him as you have wasted the last four, and find at the end of it that you've done no good to him, but only broken your heart, broken your health; and thrown away your last chance of peace and happiness; thrown away the love and admiration of your public, beggared yourself physically, mentally, morally, spiritually—every way, for a man who'll only treat you in the future as he did in the past. You won't do it! You sha'n't! Promise me you'll write him that you'll never see him again!

LORA. [After a long pause; in a calm firm voice.] Yes. I'll never see him again.

CUTLER. You mean that?

LORA. Yes. You shall see the letter.

CUTLER. And take it to him myself?

LORA. Yes. [He looks at her anxiously.] I mean it, you needn't fear.

CUTLER. Good. I'll keep you to that. And now we can take down our harp from the willow and tune up afresh.

[LORA has gone away and sat down. She is crying a little.]

CUTLER. What is it?

LORA. It all seems so useless, so hopeless. Does nothing ever come to fruit?

CUTLER. Yes. That voice of yours has just ripened to perfection. What a harvest of music there is in it; I thought last night it had never been so rich and full and persuasive. Oh, my dear, these old sorrows, these old sufferings, these old loves and hates and hopes and despairs, what are they but the discords that we have to control and select and compel into a deep harmony, for the ease and healing of others.

LORA. Then I'm never to have a life of my own?

CUTLER. No. "He only can live the world's life who has renounced his own." You've got to renounce your own life and live the world's life. There's where you'll find your satisfaction. There's where you'll find an outlet for your divine pity, and your divine song. You mustn't defraud the public any longer. You've got to sing. It's your duty, just as it's the soldier's duty to be found at his post. And if you run away you deserve to be court-martialled and shot. Think what God has given you to give out to others. It's the most precious, the most divine thing on earth —this vox humana. See what we are ready to pay for it, in worship, in love, in admiration, in applause, in money—more than we pay to any statesman, or artist, or poet, or soldier. It's the music of all music. And it's ours; it's not yours; it's ours! we demand it from you. We demand you shall treasure it, and hoard it up for us. We will have your very best. And for the future you'll give it to us, won't you?

LORA. I'll try! Dear sage, I'll try.

[*John Treganza comes in from the balcony, much excited; a roll of music in his hand.*]

JOHN. I've got it at last! I've done it!

CUTLER. What?

JOHN. Fair Rosamond's song? It has been haunting me for months. And to-night it rushed into my head, faster than I could score it down. [Pressing the roll into LORA's hands.] Just look over that, will you, and tell me if it will do?

[*LORA takes the music and goes over the notes to herself.*]

CUTLER. You're satisfied with it yourself?

JOHN. No, not quite satisfied with the opera all through. I shall do bigger things by and by, when I get a bigger subject. "Fair Rosamond" is rather a stale theme.

CUTLER. There are no stale themes, or stale stories. There are only stale authors.

JOHN. There's one thing about "Fair Rosamond." It has a good strong love interest. And they will have plenty of love in the theatre.

CUTLER. They will have plenty of love—in the theatre.

[*LORA hums out a few notes of Fair Rosamond's song.*]

[*SECCOMBE enters.*

SECCOMBE. The printers are ringing up for "The Future of the Human Race."

CUTLER. All right, Seccombe. They shall have it. Wait a moment. [LORA hums a note or two.

CUTLER. We'll try it over after supper.

JOHN. Couldn't we run over the song now? I want to hear how it comes out.

LORA. Come, then. [Exit, followed by JOHN.

CUTLER. [Very briskly.] Now, Seccombe, let's polish off the "Human Race." I'm just in the mood for it.

[SECCOMBE sits at table, and takes out his copying note-book and pencil.

CUTLER. [Feeling in his waistcoat pocket.] I've got all my notes made.

[Taking out a few slips of paper on which are pencilled notes.

SECCOMBE. There's only the tag—

CUTLER. Tags are tedious excrescences, Seccombe.

SECCOMBE. Yes—you'll cut it short, won't you?

CUTLER. I can't, Seccombe. I can't spare the Human Race. They don't deserve it. Besides, I want to show off, and end in a paean.

SECCOMBE. You aren't going to try any fine writing, are you?

CUTLER. I'm very much afraid I am. There used to be a bit of the poet in me. Let's see if we can wake him up.

SECCOMBE. You told me always to call a halt when you started fine writing.

CUTLER. Call it the next time. Now, are you ready? [Giving down from his notes.] "And over all the labours and habitations of men, over all the cities and desert places of the earth, the implacable old

Mother rings out her untiring carillon, from a tongue of iron in a fortress of stone——”

SECCOMBE. [*Stops, looks up.*] You don't suppose this is the kind of stuff the British public wants, do you?

CUTLER. No, they don't want it. But they need it. So let them have it, to correct their self-importance.

SECCOMBE. They won't understand it.

CUTLER. The onus lies upon them. I love to be a stumbling-block to fools. How far have you got?

SECCOMBE. “The implacable old Mother rings out her untiring carillon——”

CUTLER. “From a tongue of iron in a fortress of stone. ‘Multiply, my children! Increase and multiply!’ In sweat and sorrow and agony, bring forth the works of your hands, and the children of your loins. Increase and multiply! The earth is yours. Possess it, and encumber it for a season. Waste my substance! Waste your own! Come and go! Love and hate! Experiment! Toil! Blunder! Weep!”

SECCOMBE. [*Writing.*] “Weep!”

CUTLER. [*Dictating, getting more excited.*] “Succour and devour each other. Sustain and destroy. Make war. Make peace. Fail in your purposes, you accomplish mine. Thwart me, you further me. Obey me, I frustrate you. What you sow, I reap. What you devastate, I replenish. What you build, I pull down. Your will is the smoke of my nostrils, and all your generations are weeds that my breath has sown——”

SECCOMBE. [*Grumbles.*] They'll never stand this——

CUTLER. [*Rather angrily.*] Take down! Take down!

Take down ! [Walking about, looking occasionally at his notes, then half-closing his eyes, and dictating more excitedly.] "I called you forth to supplant you. I begot you to disinherit you. Before I fashioned you, I had blotted you out ; ere ever you were born, I had named you nothingness and dust. A deep pit of oblivion have I digged for you ; and there shall you be buried, and all memory of you perish, as of them that are dead of old."

SECCOMBE. [Writing.] "Dead of old."

CUTLER. "Yet increase and multiply, my children ! Fill the void places of the earth. Rejoice for an hour. Increase and multiply. The sun's blue vault I stretch above you, and Iris' rain-dyed bow. For you I paint the clouds with gold and vermillion ; and for you I powder the night with diamonds. Increase and multiply. Springtime and summer and harvest I vouchsafe you ; laughter and music and wine ; friendship, and the prattle of children——"

[A nightingale in the garden gives out a few deep, startling notes.] Jug ! Jug ! Jug !

CUTLER. [Pausing to listen.] The old strain outside, Seccombe.

[A few chords of ROSAMOND'S song are struck on the piano in the next room, and LORA'S voice is heard essaying the song, "I am loved, I am owned, I am mated."]

CUTLER. The old strain inside, Seccombe.

SECCOMBE. There was an article in the last number of the "Medical Review" proving that love is a form of paranoia.

CUTLER. It's a very agreeable form of paranoia.

SECCOMBE. My fit cost me three hundred pounds.

[*The nightingale again gives out startling notes.*

Jug ! Jug ! Jug !

CUTLER. Don't be a dog in the manger, Seccombe. Don't grudge poor mortals their "drop of Venus' honeyed joy, succeeded soon by chilly care."

[*A few chords are struck in the next room, and Lora tries her voice, uttering deep rich notes. He creeps noiselessly to the door and opens it very slowly; then comes down, a step or two away from it listening.*

SECCOMBE. What about the "Human Race" ?

CUTLER. Oh, let it perish. Listen !

[*Lora through the open door sings Fair Rosamond's song.*

I.

I am loved, I am owned, I am mated ;

Swell, thrush, that gold-bright throat ;

Burst, pierce, that wild sweet note ;

He draws near, lord of me, long awaited ;

Spill rich fierce sounds like wine,

Pour out my soul with thine ;

Sing ! Sing ! Sing !

Come meet me ! Come meet me ! Come meet me !

Sing ! Sing ! Sing !

For the garlanded earth is a song, and a fire, and
a bloom, new created.

Sing ! Sing ! Sing !

II.

Swift he rides ; hot he spurs ; on he presses ;
Plunge, horse, with sure proud feet ;
Fly, ground, their glad quick beat ;
He breaks way through the green wildernesses ;
Stop, heart, and bound again ;
Gallop with pantings ; then
Leap ! Leap ! Leap !
I greet thee ! I greet thee ! I greet thee !
Leap ! Leap ! Leap !
To my arms, and there rest, while day sinks ;
then fulfilled, after utmost caresses,
Sleep ! Sleep ! Sleep !

CURTAIN.

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